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ABSTRACT

This report critiques the movement to decentralize decision making in public education. It provides an indepth examination of school-based management (SBM) with the aim of revealing why this type of reform seems to have had so little payoff for students. It addresses several key questions: What are the objectives of SBM, and are these objectives consistent with an expectation of increased student performance? What is the theoretical basis for SBM and does that theory link SBM to student performance? How fully have SBM programs been implemented? and How can SBM be modified to increase its likelihood of positively influencing student achievement? The report is presented in four chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted to definitions, objectives, and theory underlying SBM, whereas chapter 2 focuses on SBM as it is currently practiced in school districts across America, with an emphasis on the limits of its design and implementation. Chapter 3 presents a proposed model of school-based improvement (SBI), and chapter 4 provides guidance to school boards seeking to implement this new approach. The SBI model, which builds upon existing theory, is offered as an alternative to SBM. Its ultimate objective is to improve school performance and to raise student achievement through a district-wide effort. (Contains 168 references.) (RJM)

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NSBA's Shared Vision

NSBA and its Federation Members represent 95,000 local school board members who are dedicated to educating every child to his or her fullest potential. In 1996, Federation leaders came together to forge a plan for increasing student achievement through school board leadership. This effort coalesced into a strategic vision—a vision of the National School Boards Association as a powerful, united, energetic Federation . . . as the premier advocate for public education . . . as an influential force for achieving equity and excellence in public education . . . and as a catalyst for aligning the power of the community on behalf of education.

Underlying this shared vision are certain bedrock convictions:

- belief that effective local school boards can enable all children to reach their potential
- conviction that local governance of public education is a cornerstone of democracy
- belief in the power of local school boards to convene the community around education issues
- conviction that together, local school boards can influence education policy and governance at the state and national levels
- commitment to the principle that through collaboration comes impact
- belief that the strength of local school board leadership arises from the board's capacity to represent the diversity of students and communities

About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community—to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

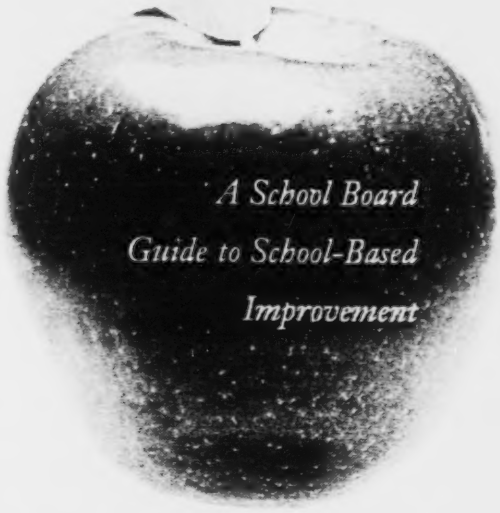
Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 14,772 local school districts that serve more than 46.5 million public school students—approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation. The 24-member Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA executive director, assisted by a professional staff. NSBA is located in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

Reinventing

School-Based Management

By Darrel W. Drury



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PREFACE

As we approach the dawn of the new millennium, raising student achievement has taken center stage in the ongoing national discourse on public education. Policymakers at the national, state, and community levels, as well as parents, the business community, civic leaders, and the media, have focused unprecedented attention on this vital theme. Across America, local school boards and state school boards associations are seizing the initiative, engaging in innovative new programs designed to improve school performance and raise student achievement.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has made the education of all children its chief priority. Toward that end, NSBA has become a leading source of information for local boards, supporting their efforts to establish policies to raise student achievement in their communities. As an integral part of that effort, in the spring of 1998, NSBA launched an ambitious series of reports on student achievement. This report, *Reinventing School-Based Management*, represents the third volume in that series.

The report begins with a critical analysis of school-based management, and, based on that analysis, it proposes a new model of school-based improvement that emphasizes the district role in promoting continuous improvement through data-driven decision making. Following a systematic theoretical presentation and a review of corroborating evidence, the report offers specific guidance to local boards wishing to implement this new approach.

We hope that this report, like those that preceded it, will support our shared mission to enhance school board effectiveness in raising student achievement in local communities across the nation.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Wheeler
President

Anne L. Byrant
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

The nation's public schools are under ever-increasing societal pressure to demonstrate greater effectiveness and efficiency. As a result, change—or, at least, the appearance of change—has become a nearly universal feature of American public education. School-based management (SBM), a reform aimed at restructuring public education through the realignment of power relations at the district and school levels, has gained wide currency as a means of effecting such change.

But after more than a decade of experience with SBM in school districts across America, a growing number of studies suggest that this reform has been largely ineffective in raising the bar for student achievement. For example, in an exhaustive review of the literature, Summers and Johnson (1996) concluded that, while relatively few project evaluations systematically assessed the effects of SBM on quantifiable measures of student performance, among those that did, all but two reported that SBM has had no effect or negative effects on achievement. Furthermore, in the case of those studies that properly isolated the influence of SBM, *none* reported evidence of a positive effect on achievement. In another review, based on more than 80 empirical studies published through 1995, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) reported similar findings. These researchers concluded that "there is an awesome gap between the rhetoric and the reality of SBM's contribution to student growth." Additional reviews of decentralization reforms in England (Whittey & Power, 1997) and other industrialized nations (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1994) lend further support to the conclusion that SBM has failed to produce significant gains in student achievement.

In light of these findings, this report provides an in-depth examination of SBM, with the aim of revealing why this reform, once heralded as the "silver bullet" of educational reforms, seems to have had so little payoff for students. Several key questions will be addressed:

- What are the objectives of SBM, and are these objectives consistent with an expectation of increased student performance?
- What is the theoretical basis for SBM, and more specifically, does that theory link SBM to student performance?
- How fully have SBM programs been implemented, and what are the major barriers to implementation?
- And, finally, how can SBM be modified to increase its likelihood of positively influencing student achievement, and what is the role of school boards in effecting this transformation?

A Vision for the Future

As the last question above suggests, this report provides more than a critical analysis of existing SBM initiatives. It also offers possible insights into the future. Building upon past experience and lessons learned from the private sector, a new approach to school-based decision making is presented. Although untested in its entirety, the basic tenets of the proposed model are supported by a growing body of empirical evidence. Still, given its speculative nature, the decision to implement this approach must rest with individual school boards, and should be based upon their independent evaluation of its conceptual integrity and corroborating evidence. Accordingly, states should resist mandating this approach—and school districts should avoid embracing it as the new "silver bullet" of school reform. Until the model is tested in one or more districts, and is proven to be successful in raising student achievement, it would be premature to implement this approach on a wider scale.

With the above caveats, the proposed model—called school-based improvement (SBI)—is offered as an alternative to SBM. It differs from SBM in several important respects. First, its ultimate objective is to improve school performance and raise student achievement. Second, it is systemic in nature and, as such, requires the establishment of a district-wide context that promotes school-based change. Third, it treats the participation of teachers and parents as central, rather than peripheral, to the process of change. Finally, SBI emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and self-renewal through data-driven decision making.

More generally, however, it is the role of the board and other central authorities that best distinguishes the proposed model from earlier approaches to school-based change. Under SBI, school boards are elevated to a new level—they become the architects and overseers of a fundamental and systemic transformation of public education.

An Institutional Perspective

If school boards are to rise to the challenge of redefining school-based management, they must first step back and consider how both SBM and school systems arrived at their present state. To this end, much of the discussion in this report rests on an approach known as institutional theory, which offers school board members a different way of looking at school systems and present-day educational practice (Drury, Salganik, & McMillen, 1995).

Typically, school systems are portrayed as rational bureaucratic organizations that produce a particular product—namely, well-educated young men and women ready to take their place in the larger society. Viewed in this light, schools and school systems are assumed to be oriented toward increasing their productivity by improving programs and curricula and adopting various reforms designed to boost student achievement. School-based management and other reform initiatives are generally thought of in this light.

Institutional theory takes an entirely different approach. It begins by asserting that, because there is no clear "technology" in education, school systems have had to seek approval and ensure their survival in ways other than demonstrating efficiency in their technical operations. By focusing on *process*, rather than outcomes, and by adopting various programs, reforms, and "institutional structures" that lend credibility to their operations, schools have successfully garnered support from their various constituents. As a result, there has been little incentive for schools to develop the kinds of programs, structures, and resources that are crucial for data-driven decision making and continuous improvement. School-based management, according to this view, was never actually intended to impact traditional classroom practices—rather, it owes its popularity to the *appearance* of rationality that it bestows upon school systems that adopt it. This points to an important issue that school board members interested in adopting, or simply evaluating, SBM should consider: Do existing models—in terms of their structure and orientation—better serve the interests of adults, by making them "feel good" about education systems, or children, by increasing their potential to learn?

Contents of the Report

Beyond this brief introduction, this report is presented in four chapters. Chapter I is directed toward developing the reader's understanding of the definitions, objectives, and theory underlying SBM. Chapter II focuses on SBM as it is currently practiced in districts across America, emphasizing the limits of its design and implementation. Chapter III presents the proposed model of school-based improvement (SBI), and Chapter IV provides guidance to school boards seeking to implement this new approach.

CHAPTER I

Theoretical Underpinnings of SBM

School-based management is an elusive concept (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1989), and definitions of the term sometimes confuse more than they enlighten (Jenni & Mauriel, 1990). Indeed, some critics charge that SBM is little more than a "catch phrase" encompassing so many meanings and approaches that it is all but irrelevant to day-to-day school operations (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1991).

Adding to this confusion, policymakers sometimes blur the distinction between SBM and its conceptual counterpart, shared decision making. Some reform advocates use the two terms interchangeably, while others treat shared decision making as one of several important elements of SBM. Hill and Bonan (1991) define "school-based management" as a *shift* in decision-making authority from district to school, but reserve "shared decision making" to describe the *redistribution* of authority among school-site stakeholders. This approach highlights the potential for variation in how schools are actually "run" under SBM. In some restructured schools, principals retain most of the real decision-making authority; in others, teachers share this authority; and, in still others, parents and community members play a significant role in school governance. These differences are not trivial and, in fact, shape much of the discussion throughout this report.

SBM's Goals and Objectives

In advocating that power be shifted from the district to the school level, education reformers have argued that SBM would bring a variety of potential benefits. It would, they contend, democratize governance, ensure greater efficiency in the utilization of resources, enhance accountability, professionalize and empower teachers, increase responsiveness to local values and preferences, and improve educational programs.

While each of these objectives has merit, it is likely that the success or failure of SBM ultimately will be judged in relation to its impact on student performance. Unfortunately, neither the theory nor the practice of SBM focuses on performance objectives. In a recent review of some 20 SBM programs, Summers and Johnson (1996) found that most restructuring plans made only vague references to student per-

formance, five made no mention of achievement, and only three specified achievement targets in clearly quantifiable terms. Another study of 24 SBM schools (Peterson, Gok, & Warren, 1995) found that few of the schools studied had well-articulated goals of *any* kind!

Rationales for SBM

Although many rationales exist for SBM, at present, there is no compelling theoretical approach that explains precisely how decentralized management might be expected to produce achievement gains. There are, however, three fundamental tenets that provide a partial foundation for such an explanation. These tenets are especially important because of their prominence among the arguments that most attract school boards, state policymakers, and others to SBM. They can be summarized as follows:

- Those closest to the "technical core" of education systems—because of their greater access to information concerning students' diverse characteristics, needs, and learning styles—will make better decisions about educational programs than those farther removed from the teaching and learning process;
- Decisions concerning curricula, instructional technologies, and other programmatic features of education will be most effective and enduring when carried out by those who feel a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for those decisions; and
- Accountability will increase when key areas of decision-making authority are shifted to the local level.

There is no compelling theoretical approach that explains precisely how decentralized management might be expected to produce achievement gains.

While these arguments have considerable appeal, their weakness derives from the fact that they are offered in isolation, without reference to the larger district context, and from their assumption that shared decision making necessarily accompanies SBM.

Embedded in the first of these tenets is the assumption that teachers have the requisite information and knowledge to improve student performance. But, support for this premise is mixed, at best. Some observers have expressed concern about the state of present-day teacher-training programs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), and others point out that many teachers lack the basic knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to teach effectively (Firestone, 1996). Still, a growing body of evidence suggests that at least some teachers do hold the "key" to raising student achievement (Haycock, 1998). One of the challenges facing SBM, and an important objective of this report, is to determine the means by which such teacher-specific knowledge can be accessed and utilized at the school level.

The second tenet holds that staff involvement in decision making will result in increased commitment to new educational programs. But this premise rests on the assumption that school-site staff members actually seek an active role in decision making and perceive their influence to be meaningful. Indeed, SBM may not produce a greater sense of "ownership" or commitment among teachers in schools that endow principals with virtually all real decision-making authority. Even in those schools fully embracing participatory management, staff ownership over decisions may not be sufficient to sustain new instructional programs. Without appropriate incentives, innovation may give way to retrenchment and the reintroduction of traditional approaches to instruction.

Finally, the third tenet above suggests that school-based management will produce greater accountability in schools. This assertion stems from the belief that local decision making promotes both *civic* and *professional* quality controls. Some advocates suggest that parents and community members—as participants in the decision-making process—will provide an important source of local oversight. That oversight may be uneven, however, since it depends on the priorities, standards, and capabilities of parents, which are likely to vary from one neighborhood to the next (Hannaway, 1996). Other observers contend that, when teachers are actively engaged in decision making, they will develop professional standards that result in greater accountability (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Again, however, these arguments assume that SBM includes both decentralized management and shared decision making. Schools that vest decision-making authority solely in school-site administrators would likely experience no greater civic and professional controls than schools operating within traditional bureaucratic structures.

Key Questions:

1. *How is SBM defined in your district?*
2. *What are its objectives?*
3. *Is raising student achievement at the heart—the raison d'être—of your district's approach, plans, and strategies related to SBM?*
4. *What evidence do you have that those plans and strategies are actually linked to student achievement?*
5. *Is shared decision making at the school level an essential aspect of SBM in your district?*
6. *Have SBM and shared decision making increased the quality of decision making, stakeholder commitment, and accountability in your district?*

Lessons from the Private Sector

It is increasingly evident that, in the absence of a clear focus on school performance, SBM has become an end in itself. While much attention is given to who gains and who loses power under SBM, little attention is given to other important areas essential to effective decision making. In this respect, educators have much to learn from the private sector.

Early decentralization reforms, designed to promote human growth and "democratize" the workplace, had little discernible impact on organizational performance (Mohrman, 1994). Eventually, however, organization theorists began to focus attention on the ways in which participatory management promoted greater efficiency in the production process (Block, 1990; Walton, 1985). These scholars concluded that high performance results where employees are deeply involved in the ongoing improvement of the organization and are committed to its success. Initially, this insight was closely linked to applications in the manufacturing sector, but, as the nature of knowledge- and information-based work became better understood (Pava, 1983; Zuboff, 1984), it became clear that this approach could be adapted to fit other settings as well.

High-Involvement Management Theory

With this new understanding, researchers developed a framework for high-involvement management that could be applied to a broad range of organizational settings (Lawler, 1986; Mohrman, Lawler, & Mohrman, 1992). According to this approach, employees are likely to perform best when they have the ability: (1) to influence their work environment; (2) to participate in problem solving; and (3) to understand and contribute to organizational success.

The high-involvement approach requires the decentralization of four essential resources which, in combination, determine the effectiveness of participatory management:

- ***Power*** to influence decisions affecting work processes, policies, and strategy;
- ***Information*** that furthers understanding of the organization's operational systems, external environment, performance requirements, and level of performance;
- ***Knowledge*** required for effective job performance; and
- ***Rewards*** aligned with the self-interest of employees and with the success of the organization.

Early evidence of the impact of high-involvement management on organizational productivity is impressive. Researchers report that companies adopting high-involvement practices consistently outperform those adopting more traditional, hierarchical management approaches (Denison, 1990; Kravetz, 1988; Mitchell, Lewin, & Lawler, 1990). Furthermore, those firms implementing these practices more extensively perform better and produce higher quality goods and services than those with less extensive implementation (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992).

Lawler and his associates contend that a high-involvement strategy is particularly well suited to schools. They suggest that management strategy depends on the nature of work, which can be characterized by: (1) its complexity; (2) whether it is best done individually or in groups; and (3) the degree of uncertainty associated with the work. Simple, individual, and highly certain work lends itself to hierarchical organization, but complex, collegial, and uncertain work—which, they argue, characterizes education—lends itself more to decentralized, high-involvement strategies.

Overcoming Education's Institutional Heritage

The presence of additional resources at the school level would, almost certainly, facilitate better decision making and give school personnel a greater stake in the education process. However, in many districts, information systems are inadequate, pedagogical knowledge is uncertain, and reward systems, where they exist, are poorly aligned with ultimate educational objectives.[1]

If SBM or any other reform strategy is going to improve student achievement, additional resources—including information, knowledge, and rewards—must be made accessible at the school site. But it will be necessary to *develop* capacity in these areas, not simply *devolve* capacity from central office to school site. In particular, the development of modern, school-based information systems capable of (a) monitoring student, class, and school performance and (b) tracking the flow of resources to the classroom level will be crucial to the process of transforming both schools and SBM.

[1] Deficiencies in these important organizational resources undoubtedly have much to do with the "institutional" nature of education systems. Rational bureaucratic organizations—for example, manufacturing plants—ensure their survival by maximizing efficiency in the production process, focusing attention on problems arising in their core technologies. But education systems, which lack clear technologies and operate largely outside of competitive markets, have only recently begun to focus on outputs. Thus, they have had little reason to develop adequate informational systems, and today, many districts operate in a virtual information void.

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Data-Driven Decision Making

Increasing the presence of information, knowledge, and rewards throughout school systems constitutes an important condition for the successful functioning of SBM. But even fully informed, knowledgeable, and motivated school-site decision makers can make bad decisions. To ensure their effectiveness, school-site stakeholders also must be endowed with the means of processing information and applying knowledge to generate higher-quality decisions.

If SBM or any other reform strategy is going to improve student achievement, additional resources . . . must be made accessible at the school site.

In the private sector, a sound mechanism for translating information and knowledge into sound decisions has existed for some time. Total Quality Management (TQM), the brainchild of W. Edwards Deming (1986), is both a philosophy and a set of practices designed to improve quality and increase productivity. According to Deming, to maximize success, organizations must create a clearly defined sense of purpose toward the improvement of products and services. Improvement becomes a continuous, never-ending process, achievable when the strengths of individual workers are recognized, innovation is encouraged, and decisions are based on facts rather than opinions. A hallmark of the TQM philosophy is its "reliance on rational decision making based on specific reproducible facts" (Fahey & Ryan, 1992). When decision making is raised to an objective standard based on data, not opinion, the quality of decisions is improved and much of the rancor and manipulation commonly associated with participatory decision making is eliminated. As one TQM advocate puts it, "In God we trust. All others must bring data" (Schmoker & Wilson, 1993).

The Need for Synthesis

Although the concepts and principles reviewed here were originally developed to improve performance in the private sector, they also provide the basis for extending and refining SBM theory. Some researchers have begun to apply the "high-involvement" model to SBM, emphasizing the need to go beyond current conceptions of decentralized governance as a simple transfer of power (Mohrman et al., 1992). Others advocate a model of school-based decision making grounded in the principles of TQM (Schmoker & Wilson, 1993). However, neither perspective alone provides a systematic framework for redefining school-based management. The increased presence of information, knowledge, and rewards in schools is essential, but without a means for translating these resources into higher-quality decisions, the success of schools adopting high-involvement practices remains uncertain. Similarly, schools striving for self-renewal through the application of TQM and allied approaches can expect to have their best efforts thwarted when confronted with crucial resource deficiencies. If SBM is to fulfill its promise as a means of transforming American public education, school systems must take the first steps to significantly increase the resource base of site-managed schools and schools must begin to embrace a philosophy of continuous improvement and self-renewal.

Key Questions:

1. *In your district, is SBM supported by the presence of sufficient information, knowledge, and rewards at the school level?*
2. *What information exists at the school and district levels to evaluate and compare the performance of students, teachers, schools, curricula, texts, etc.?*
3. *Do individual schools and school districts have access to information about what works and what doesn't work?*
4. *To what extent do school-site decision makers in your district make use of data to guide decision making?*
5. *Do school-site decision makers know how to use and interpret data, and is there consistency in the understanding of data across the district?*
6. *How does your district support the data and knowledge needs within individual school buildings?*
7. *If you are considering initiating SBM at a particular site, are the decision makers and other participants adequately prepared to assume their new roles and responsibilities?*
8. *Do decision makers at the school site have adequate, ongoing support to enable them to make sound judgments based on the information that is available to them?*

CHAPTER II

School-Based Management in Practice

As with so many previous education reforms, the lack of a systematic theoretical foundation to guide the implementation of SBM has in no way precluded its adoption by school districts across the nation. In a single decade, SBM has become fully ensconced as a part of the American public education landscape, and, today, a majority of districts across the United States operate under some form of decentralized governance.

But despite its widespread popularity, there is growing concern among some observers that a combination of unforeseen factors has rendered SBM "a fairly weak intervention in our arsenal of school reform measures" (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Critics charge that several factors have limited the impact of school-based management on educational outcomes, including:

- A lack of focus on achievement;
- Environmental constraints, stakeholder resistance, and institutional barriers that limit its implementation;
- Limits on the scope of schools' authority over budget, staffing, and instructional programs;
- Concentration of authority in the hands of school administrators; and
- Deficiencies in crucial resources—information, knowledge, and rewards—across organizational levels.

A Lack of Focus on Achievement

Most reform advocates agree that a shared vision—one that provides both inspiration and direction—is an essential element in effective SBM initiatives. In districts engaged in decentralized decision making, local boards of education typically formulate broad policies and educational objectives that define the district's overall mission, while schools seek ways to realize that shared vision (Lindelow, 1981).

All too often, however, SBM districts focus on goals that are only tangentially related to improving student performance (Summers & Johnson, 1996). This, in turn, influences the mission statements and school improvement plans (SIPs) of individual site-managed schools. Rarely do school-based planning initiatives involve core issues of curriculum and instructional programming. Rather, they tend to emphasize peripheral issues, such as hall duty, campus beautification, and the assignment of parking space. This trivialization of goals and objectives represents a natural response to the limited authority and resources available to schools under SBM and also may reflect the lack of training, knowledge, and/or motivation of participants.

In addition to defining their objectives too narrowly, decision makers at the district and individual school levels often generate so many initiatives that none can be effectively implemented (Fullan, 1992, 1993). Faced with this proliferation of goals, many schools employ a division of labor wherein several small groups pursue separate initiatives. As a result, the impetus for innovation often quickly dissipates, leaving little energy for collective movement toward broader schoolwide goals (Calhoun & Allen, 1996).

Key Questions:

1. *Do site-managed schools in your district operate under a broad vision developed at the central level? Within that vision, do individual schools create their own goals and objectives?*
2. *To what extent do district and school goals focus on raising student achievement?*
3. *Is raising student achievement the focal point of SBM in your district, or one of many objectives?*

Limits on Implementation

Several factors have limited the implementation of school-based management and, therefore, its impact on school performance. First, SBM initiatives must contend with district, state, and federal policies that circumscribe the authority of schools. Second, widespread stakeholder resistance has significantly impeded the implementation process. Those with a vested interest in maintaining existing power relations, as well as those who are simply comfortable with the *status quo*, have been largely successful in marginalizing this reform. Finally, as viewed through the lens of institutional theory, there may be little reason to expect the successful implementation of this (or any other reform), given the loose connection between boardroom policies and classroom behaviors.

Environmental Constraints

Policies at the district, state, and federal levels, along with collective bargaining agreements, often combine to restrict school-site autonomy and promote uniformity in standards and practice. Hence, some

observers might agree with Elmore's (1993) dismal assessment that, in many instances, the idea that SBM involves the decentralization of authority and responsibility to schools is no more than "a convenient fiction."

District-Level Constraints. In designing SBM programs, district-level policymakers typically develop decentralization plans that specify the degree of authority devolved to individual schools. In states with "home rule" provisions, districts have substantial latitude to craft broad-based SBM initiatives. In most states, however, school boards have only that authority expressly delegated by law or implied by statute. In the absence of enabling legislation, many school districts cannot choose more aggressive forms of SBM. For example, states often assign school boards ultimate responsibility for hiring and discharging personnel. Under such circumstances, boards can establish advisory bodies to assist them in those actions, but cannot, legally, delegate final authority in these areas.

In many instances, the idea that SBM involves the decentralization of authority and responsibility to schools is no more than "a convenient fiction."

Beyond such state-imposed constraints, school districts sometimes *choose* to maintain central control in certain areas. A centralized system offers advantages for ensuring compliance with due process requirements, civil rights laws, federal employment and compensation guidelines, desegregation orders, and other legal requirements, as well as in providing those functions that benefit from economies of scale, such as transportation and insurance. In some instances, districts will delegate substantial authority to schools but mandate specific policies to ensure compliance with state and federal laws. For example, to reduce the legal exposure inherent in site-based staff selection plans, boards typically specify criteria that govern the selection process. Or, where site-based management gives schools the authority to enter into contracts for the purchase of goods and services, local boards generally hold schools accountable for complying with state bidding procedures. In other cases, however, because of their legal responsibility to the state and their political accountability to the taxpayers, school boards are reluctant to delegate additional authority to the site level.

While some district-level constraints on school authority are both logical and prudent, other restrictions imposed by central authorities seem less compelling. For example, many districts impose their own limits on schools' ability to select curricula and textbooks, even where state law allows local school boards substantial flexibility. Local policymakers continue to give inconsistent signals on a broad range of subjects, including budget, curriculum, teaching, and student learning (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). If SBM is to succeed, school boards must consider not only how site operations should change, but also whether or not they are prepared to make changes in their own role and function as governing entities (see Chapter IV).

Union contracts negotiated at the district level often impose further limits on the authority of individual site-managed schools (Mirel, 1990; Neal, 1991). Standard contract provisions—e.g., class size limitations, seniority rights, etc.—limit the flexibility of school-site management teams. And, in those cases where special contract provisions govern the implementation of reform, even stronger restrictions often apply. Nearly a third of the restructuring projects regulated by formal agreements with National Education Association affiliates limit the scope of authority at the school site. Typically, the union has either: (1) joint management; (2) representation on a district-level board; or (3) "sign-off" authority on individual school projects (National Education Association, 1991).

Increasingly, board regulations and collective bargaining agreements allow schools to seek waivers for certain rules, policies, and contractual commitments. But by placing the onus on schools to seek and secure waivers, instead of granting the requisite authority outright, district-level policymakers implicitly sanction existing bureaucratic regulations and legitimize the *status quo*. Those critical of waivers are convincing in their argument that this approach inhibits school-level change efforts (Murphy, 1991).

State laws determine the amount and kind of authority local school districts can delegate to schools.

State-Level Constraints. State-level constraints on site-managed schools operate indirectly, through state regulatory frameworks, and directly, through legislation governing SBM. State laws determine the amount and kind of authority local school districts can delegate to schools. While some states, such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and Maryland, have begun to scale back regulatory frameworks to allow greater school-site autonomy (Bradley, 1989; Flax, 1989), others continue to promulgate new legislation and procedures that ultimately may stifle this reform movement (Stevenson & Pellicer, 1992). States have enacted laws specifying class size, teacher assignments, time of instruction, and curriculum (e.g., mandated "add-ons"), all of which compete with local program decisions.

Prescriptive and restrictive state laws governing SBM present equally serious threats to the creativity and flexibility that decentralization is intended to promote. For example, Kentucky's Education Reform Act (KERA) explicitly grants schools the right to establish policies concerning "instructional practices" (KRS 160.345), but simultaneously mandates a primary school program that *prescribes* multi-age/multi-ability classrooms along with six other "critical" program attributes (KRS 156.160). Other states have enacted reform legislation that limits the ability of districts to redistribute authority at the school level. In Texas, for example, a state law guaranteeing principals substantial authority to choose professional and nonprofessional staff limits school boards' authority—should they wish to exercise it—to extend responsibility for staffing decisions to teachers and other stakeholders (Tex. Educ. Code 13.352(d)).

Federal-Level Constraints. Federal constraints on the authority of site-managed schools include regulations attached to programs providing financial support to education, as well as labor and civil rights laws. The U.S. Department of Education provides some $16 billion per year to America's public schools, primarily through a dozen or so programs affecting K-12 education. While participation in these programs is voluntary, districts receiving federal support must comply with administrative, planning, and fiscal reporting requirements that can divert both time and energy from school-site improvement efforts. Finally, although the necessity for civil rights laws and other constitutional protections is clear, they may, nevertheless, limit staffing, curricular, enrollment, and other decisions that, in a perfect world, would be made solely at the local level.

Stakeholder Resistance

Change often gives rise to resistance, particularly when the rationale and objectives for change are ill defined. These conditions prevail in many site-managed districts across America, and, predictably, resistance has been widespread. Those voicing discontent include school board members, central office staff, teachers and teachers' unions, and school administrators (Glickman, 1990).

School Board Members. Some school board members perceive site-based management as a threat to their own political power base, rather than as an opportunity to create systemic change (Brown, 1991; Guthrie, 1986). By limiting school-level decision-making authority, overriding individual school improvement plans, or rejecting schools' requests to waive district policies, board members can minimize the impact of SBM on their own positions of authority. Such acts of active and passive resistance are not at all uncommon during the implementation of SBM (Brown, 1990; 1995; Lindquist & Mauriel, 1989). In the absence of more compelling evidence of its success, SBM tends to be implemented on a more substantial scale in those districts where reform is imposed *externally*—e.g., Kentucky's legislative mandate—as compared with those where change is negotiated *internally* (Drury & Levin, 1994; Moore, 1990).

Central Office Staff. Some central office employees experience confusion and anxiety when school-site governance plans fail to adequately redefine their roles (Wagstaff & Reyes, 1993). They may find it difficult to embrace a system that is the antithesis of that which has rewarded them in the past

(Burke, 1992). Thus, researchers report that central office employees tend to be "the most prominent among the groups that work against the implementation of decentralization" (Brown, 1990). Studies reveal overt attempts by central office staff to block SBM's implementation (Brown, 1990; Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989), as well as more covert efforts to reshape the reform to suit their own agenda (Finn, 1991).

Some central office employees . . . may find it difficult to embrace a system that is the antithesis of that which has rewarded them in the past.

Teachers/Teachers' Unions. Teachers also may experience difficulty in adapting to the new roles required of them under SBM, and many express these feelings through passive and active resistance (Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1990). Some teachers are reluctant to give up their autonomy and unwilling to accept the greater accountability that accompanies shared decision making and collaborative work (Hannaway, 1992). The traditional norms of the profession, which provide little support for collaborative models of management and tacit acceptance of the traditional decision-making role of principals, represent another important source of resistance to SBM (Weiss & Cambone, 1993). Other sources of resistance include excessive work demands created by involvement in shared decision making as well as the opportunity costs of participation (Chapman & Boyd, 1986; Duke et al., 1980; Malen et al., 1989). Finally, many teachers express concern about the participation of parents and other community members in school decision making, especially when those decisions encroach on professional domains of curriculum and student learning (Dellar, 1992; Jewell & Rosen, 1993). Toch and Cooper (1990) conclude that:

> Teachers, the very people who should be advocating reform, have posed one of the biggest obstacles. Far from embracing new ideas, teachers often feel threatened by them. Improvement still means change, and change—both real and imagined—challenges teachers' routines, values and, sometimes, their livelihoods.

Teachers' unions sometimes present additional obstacles to the effective implementation of SBM. Union resistance tends to be rooted in the confrontational model that has come to define American labor relations. Shared decision making through site-based management blurs the traditional distinction between labor and management, resulting in "less union confrontation with school officials and greater difficulty in membership recruitment" (Frels, 1992). Union officials also express concern that SBM may jeopardize their collective bargaining positions at the district level. In districts where teachers' unions exercise sufficient clout to dictate the form that school-site governance will assume, opposition has been minimal. But, where their influence is more limited, as in non-collective-bargaining states, union antipathy toward SBM sometimes gives rise to unveiled attempts to sabotage this reform (Brown, 1995).

School-Site Administrators. School-site administrators typically gain new authority under SBM, but often it is accompanied by new roles, responsibilities, and greater accountability. In districts where teachers or parents have new authority of their own—especially through elected representation on school-site councils—principals face other challenges. Those who embrace shared decision making may see a reduction in conflict, enhanced administrator/faculty relationships, and an overall improvement in school climate. However, those who cannot (or will not) adopt a collaborative management style are likely to encounter the opposite response. These administrators, reluctant to share power and "fearful of losing their authority" (Smith, 1993), may engage in activities designed to subvert the implementation of SBM.[2]

[2] Some principals point out that it is both unrealistic and inequitable to expect school administrators to share authority, but not responsibility (Drury & Levin, 1994). Broadening the base of accountability in schools to include teachers and other stakeholders may help in overcoming such objections, perhaps eliminating one important source of resistance to school-based decision making.

Large-scale change inevitably threatens the established order and requires people to give up the "comfortable ways of doing things" that have previously given definition to their lives.

With so much at stake for so many, and with so little theoretical foundation, it is not surprising that SBM has encountered widespread resistance. Large-scale change inevitably threatens the established order and requires people to give up the "comfortable ways of doing things" that have previously given definition to their lives (Harrison et al., 1989). Where change involves "a fundamental alteration to existing decision making structures" and implies a redefinition of roles and responsibilities, the potential for conflict is greatest (Dellar, 1992). Under these circumstances, real change may not be possible without a universally shared vision and a clear understanding of the potential benefits of the "new order." Board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members must establish clear priorities, rethink the direction that this reform has taken, and apply all of the knowledge at their disposal to redefine its existence. Only then is stakeholder resistance likely to be supplanted by a shared sense of commitment and uniformity of purpose.

An Institutional Perspective

Certainly, both environmental constraints and stakeholder resistance have contributed to the weak implementation of SBM. But on another level, it may be the institutional nature of public education itself that has most severely undercut this reform. According to this perspective, SBM was never intended to alter traditional patterns of organization in the classroom. Rather, this reform has served as a kind of "institutional window dressing," providing a veneer of rationality and efficiency while leaving day-to-day operations intact.[3] The implication is that, if SBM is to achieve full implementation, school systems must undergo deep, systemic change and reorient themselves to raising student achievement. The recent focus on standards in K-12 education represents a move in this direction, but setting standards without giving schools (and school districts) the resources to become rational, productive organizations is an exercise in futility.

Finally, although the approach outlined here clearly suggests that SBM is itself a vestige of the institutional character of public education systems, one should not infer that this reform should be abandoned. Rather, with proper redirection, SBM could serve as a catalyst for change and play a preeminent role in the process of redefining the essential nature of public schools. In Chapter III, the form that such a redirection might take will be explored further, and, in Chapter IV, the role of school boards in orchestrating that transformation will be defined.

[3] Again, because school systems lack clear technologies to ensure their productivity (measured in terms of student achievement), they frequently seek other means of gaining approval, including, in this case, new governance structures—which, because they reflect broad cultural values (e.g., efficiency, democracy, professionalism), are instrumental in ensuring support from the environment. Finally, because the "surface structures" of education systems—i.e., school boards, central offices, school-site councils, etc.—are largely disconnected from the activities of the classroom, local school districts are able to give the *appearance* of massive change while maintaining stability in their underlying patterns of organization (Elmore, 1996).

FIGURE 1. OBSTACLES TO SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS	STAKEHOLDER RESISTANCE
District Level The authority granted to individual schools may be limited because of district-wide concerns over: • Compliance with legal requirements (due process, employment guidelines, desegregation orders, etc.) • Negotiated contracts • Economies of scale	**School Board** Some board members may limit school-level decision making because they see SBM as a threat to their own authority or their concept of responsible governance.
State Level Legislation and regulations may impose constraints in regard to: • Allowing certain decisions at the site level • Distribution of authority • Teacher-initiated programs	**Central Office Administration** Unless their role under SBM is adequately redefined, central office administrators may experience: • Diminished sense of authority • Role confusion • Lack of job security
Federal Level Staffing, planning, reporting, and other functions may be regulated under a variety of mandates, (e.g., labor and civil rights laws), as well as conditions placed on the use of federal grants.	**Building-level Administration** Despite the new authority they stand to gain under SBM, principals may fear: • Greater responsibilities • Greater accountability • Loss of traditional line authority
	Teachers The changes that SBM brings may lead teachers to fear: • Loss of classroom autonomy • Greater accountability • More responsibility for decision making • Parent involvement that encroaches on their professionalism

Key Questions:

1. *To what degree do environmental constraints at the district, state, and federal levels limit the authority of site-managed schools in your district?*
2. *Are all of the district-level constraints on site-managed schools in your district required in a legal or political sense, or are there areas of authority that might still be delegated to schools?*
3. *To what degree do you, as a board member, perceive site-based management as a threat to your school board's authority over and responsibility for elementary and secondary public education in your district?*
4. *Where are the key pockets of resistance to SBM in your district? What steps has your board taken to overcome these pockets of resistance?*
5. *How has SBM in your district altered traditional patterns of organization in the classroom?*

Delegation of Authority

As previously observed, SBM has focused almost exclusively on the devolution of decision-making authority from central to school-site actors. Even in this area, however, implementation has been limited. Rarely does school-site governance endow schools with real control over key elements of organization. In most cases, decentralization means "some incremental shift of responsibility from central administration to the school site on some limited set of dimensions" (Elmore, 1993). In particular, schools operating under SBM often lack significant authority over budget, staffing, and instructional programming.

Budget

Under SBM, schools typically receive some portion of the total district budget allocated according to their calculated need for equipment, materials, supplies, and services, or as a lump sum based on a specific, per-student distribution. Additional funds that a district may receive from federal and state programs are often passed directly on to school sites (Clune & White, 1988).

Personnel expenditures generally represent more than 85 percent of a district's budget, and other fixed costs may account for another 5 to 10 percent. With 90 to 95 percent of a school's budget determined before funds are even allocated, few discretionary dollars remain for school-based improvement initiatives. Thus, the budgetary authority of site-managed schools is generally quite limited—an issue that is "beginning to emerge as one of the key obstacles to effective school restructuring" (Odden & Busch, 1998).

The extent to which locally governed schools have flexibility over the *use* of discretionary funds represents another important budgetary issue. Many districts limit schools' freedom to transfer funds among budget categories, thereby potentially undercutting their ability to address the full range of student needs. Other districts establish restrictions on the use of funds to purchase goods and services from external sources. In Detroit, for example, schools can contract with outside vendors, but do not receive full-dollar value when purchasing goods or services from non-district suppliers. And, in Chicago, purchases must be made from a pre-approved list of vendors unless a waiver has been obtained from the district (Hess, 1991). Finally, some districts limit the authority of schools to carry over funds from one

fiscal year to the next. In Prince William County, Virginia, for example, carry-over limits are set at $1,000 per year for elementary schools, $2,000 for middle schools, and $3,000 for high schools (Drury & Levin, 1994). Such constraints make it impossible for schools to accumulate funds to purchase laboratory equipment, computers, or other "big ticket" items.

Staffing

Advocates of SBM contend that, if site-governed schools are to be held accountable for achieving high performance standards, it is essential that they be given substantial authority over both the selection of staff and the definition of staffing needs. Without such authority, they argue, schools cannot build cohesive faculties that share a common vision and support the distinctive teaching and learning strategies of individual campuses.

If site-governed schools are to be held accountable for achieving high performance standards, it is essential that they be given substantial authority over both the selection of staff and the definition of staffing needs.

In most cases, SBM schools have some degree of control over the selection and hiring of non-administrative staff. However, there are several important limitations to this authority. For example, districts generally require schools to hire from district-approved lists (although schools often retain the option of rejecting the entire list). State and district regulations governing class size, teacher certification, and hiring practices impose additional limits on decisions involving personnel. Finally, where union influence is strong, contract provisions may further constrain the authority of school-site decision makers. In these districts, schools generally must accept within-district transfers on a strict seniority basis. Likewise, where vacancies are created by shifting student population, staff attrition, or for the maintenance of racial balance, staffing decisions are normally based on years of experience and personal preference, with little school input.

In some districts operating under SBM, schools are accorded the additional authority to determine the *mix* of staff and other resources. This gives schools the flexibility to apply funds budgeted for teachers to other purposes. For example, a school may decide to fill a vacancy as it is currently defined, hire someone with a different certification to perform an entirely different function, or use the money to acquire books, supplies, and instructional materials (Lindelow, 1981; Steffy, 1993).

As a rule, the authority to select and hire school administrators has not been delegated to schools operating under SBM. Principals are typically hired by local school boards upon the recommendation of the superintendent. Committees of school administrators, teachers, and parents sometimes advise the superintendent, but these recommendations are not binding. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Under Kentucky state law, when a principalship becomes vacant, school-site councils designate a new principal from a list of qualified applicants provided by the superintendent. And, in Chicago, local school councils have the legal authority to hire principals for a term of four years (Bryk, 1993).

Instructional Program

While some districts operating under SBM have given school-site decision makers substantial authority to shape their own curricula and instructional programs, others have not. In the least restrictive districts, central authorities establish a broad framework of "goals, objectives, and expected outcomes," but leave the methods of producing results "in the hands of the building staff" (Clune & White, 1988). In more restrictive cases, district-level policymakers prescribe specific programmatic features. For example, in four of six site-governed districts examined by Drury and Levin (1994), texts were selected at the district level, significantly limiting the authority of schools to adapt curricula to local needs.

Critics point out that there is little evidence to support the claim that teachers, unfettered by central constraints, would unleash a torrent of creative energies, resulting in dramatically improved productiv-

Critics point out that there is little evidence to support the claim that teachers, unfettered by central constraints, would unleash a torrent of creative energies, resulting in dramatically improved productivity.

ity (Hannaway, 1996). Indeed, a lack of effective controls over instructional processes and outputs already has given teachers power over programmatic features of instruction well beyond their current level of authority in this area. The activities of individual teachers determine the manner in which policies dictated by central authorities get implemented, and in this sense, they are the "ultimate arbiters" of instructional policy (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). As Hannaway (1996) correctly observes, from the perspective of individual teachers, SBM actually "centralizes decision making in the school," *decreasing* rather than *increasing* their discretion.

But there is an important distinction between the exercise of *power* over instructional methods by virtue of one's isolation from inspection and the exercise of *authority* (i.e., legitimate control) over such matters. The former requires that instructional variation remain hidden behind the classroom door—beyond the reach of professional controls—whereas the latter creates the potential for open discussion and evaluation of competing approaches. Because teachers currently exercise substantial power, but little authority, over programmatic decisions, there is wide variation from classroom to classroom in both approach and productivity. Thus, the object in devolving authority in this domain is not so much to increase teachers' discretion over instruction, but to *legitimize* the influence that they already have. Without such authority, teachers cannot safely acknowledge pedagogical differences, objectively evaluate the relative merits of alternative instructional strategies, or begin to develop norms of professional behavior.

Key Questions:

1. *To what extent do site-managed schools in your district have budgetary authority? Do they have the authority to: (a) transfer funds among budget categories; (b) purchase goods and services from external sources; and (c) carry over funds from one fiscal year to the next?*

2. *To what degree do site-managed schools in your district exercise control or influence over the selection and hiring of non-administrative staff? Do they have the authority to determine the mix of staff and other resources? To select or influence the hiring of school administrators?*

3. *To what extent do site-managed schools in your district have the discretion to shape their own curricula and instructional programs? How has the availability of advanced technology influenced the individual and collaborative authority of teachers to make curricular and instructional decisions? How have state and local standards influenced their authority in this area?*

4. *Where individual schools have added flexibility in these areas, has it had a discernible impact on student achievement independent of other factors (e.g., socio-economic shifts, adjustment to new state standards or tests)?*

Redistribution of Authority

Just as the magnitude and scope of authority delegated to SBM sites vary widely from one program to another, so too does the degree to which that authority is redistributed among school-site constituents. Most schools adopting SBM have established school-site decision-making councils composed of administrators, teachers, parents, and, to a lesser extent, community members and students. However, there is little evidence to suggest that these formal arrangements have significantly altered traditional influence relationships found in schools (Malen et al., 1989).

In some districts—particularly those in which teacher union influence is strong—professional staff members exercise some influence over school-level decision making. But, overall, administrator control is more widespread and professional control less prevalent than is generally assumed (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Even in those districts where teachers have a formal voice in decision making through elected representatives to school-site councils, principals often retain control. School administrators typically participate in council deliberations at high rates, while teachers tend to be less active, less assertive, and, ultimately, less influential (Easton & Storey, 1994). Evidence suggests that, in far too many instances, site councils share information but avoid serious decision making (Jenni, 1990). Thus, critics charge that "school councils operate more as ancillary advisors or *pro forma* endorsers than as major policymakers" (Malen et al., 1989).

Parent and community involvement in shared decision making has been equally limited. In part, this can be attributed to a deep-seated professional discomfort with lay control over school decision making (Dellar, 1992). Also, because critical decision-making areas are widely perceived to fall under the purview of education "professionals," parents tend to limit their input to relatively peripheral issues. Finally, even in those districts that give external constituents a formal role in policy making, the authority of elected representatives is often compromised by low voter turnout. In Chicago, where parents and community members hold 8 of 11 seats on local school councils, voter turnout for council elections dropped precipitously after the first round in 1989 (Hess, 1992). And, in the much-touted Kentucky experiment in decentralization, "parent participation in running for the council and voting in elections is dismally small" (David, 1993).[4]

Ironically, average test scores may actually provide less information about the efficacy of schools than the traditional input measures that they have replaced.

A high level of teacher involvement increases the likelihood that decisions will reflect the views of those closest to the education process and may also strengthen teachers' motivation and commitment to faithfully implement those decisions. Furthermore, significant teacher involvement is essential to the development of norms regulating professional behavior, just as the broad and representative participation of parents and community members is required to ensure effective local oversight. Teachers' limited influence, combined with the low rate of participation of parents and other community members, may, therefore, undermine SBM's potential to significantly impact student outcomes.

[4] In addition to their characteristically low rate of participation, parents serving on site-based decision-making teams often fail to reflect the diversity of the communities they represent. In Kentucky, for example, African Americans represent 8 percent of the population, but make up less than 1 percent of school council parent representatives. Lower initial rates of participation among minority parents are compounded by "higher attrition rates, lower attendance rates, and lower meeting contribution/interaction rates *after* minority representatives take their place on decision-making teams" (Carr, 1996). The low level of participation of minority parents in school-site governance seems to reflect "pragmatic obstacles"—i.e., difficulties getting to the school, securing child care, or fitting meetings into busy work schedules—as well as feelings of "powerlessness" and an "overall lack of purpose" (Carr, 1996).

Key Questions:

1. *How much influence do teachers in your district's site-managed schools have over site-based decision making?*
2. *How involved are parents and community members in site-based decision making?*
3. *Do teachers and/or parents want more decision-making authority? If so, in what areas? How well prepared are they to make the kinds of decisions that they are empowered to make?*

Deficiencies in Other Crucial Resources

Advocates of SBM often argue in favor of granting schools additional decision-making authority, particularly in key functional domains such as budget, staffing, and instructional programs. Yet few seem to recognize the role of other crucial resources—i.e., information, knowledge, and incentives—in boosting the productivity of site-governed schools, and those who do tend to present an overly optimistic view of the capacity of local school districts to provide these resources. The challenge of bringing the most effective resources to the site level is not just one of *redistributing* existing resources from central office to school sites, but also one of *creating* resources that do not currently exist.

Information

Information is perhaps the most crucial resource that schools must have to support the effective functioning of SBM. Information—in the form of instructional goals, performance data, budget reports, etc.—can drive the development of school-based learning initiatives and support the creation of effective systems of accountability and rewards. Though recent advances in information technologies have made it feasible to distribute a wide array of information throughout school systems at an acceptable cost, most districts rely upon an information base that is, at best, poorly suited for school-based decision making. Most school systems continue to gather, analyze, and report data on a district-level basis, despite the fact that it is the individual school, not the system, that represents "the unit of education production" (Speakman, Cooper, Holsomback, May, Sampieri, & Maloney, 1997). Improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of SBM programs will require the development and implementation of modern information systems that track resources to the school and classroom levels and offer meaningful measures of school performance.

Valid and reliable performance indicators have been particularly slow to develop in public education. Historically, schools have demonstrated their compliance with state regulatory standards by emphasizing the presence of valued "inputs," such as the number of books in school libraries or the qualifications of teachers. However, recent demands for greater public accountability increasingly have led school districts to adopt performance measures defined in terms of "outcomes," such as average test scores. Ironically, average test scores may actually provide *less* information about the efficacy of schools than the traditional input measures that they have replaced. While average test scores can describe the achievement of students in a particular school or classroom, they are invalid and potentially misleading as a means of evaluating reform or as a measure of school performance (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. WHY AVERAGE TEST SCORES FAIL TO MEASURE UP

Average test scores are inappropriate as measures of school performance for several reasons (Meyer, 1996):

- They reflect the combined influence of family, background, community, and years of prior schooling on student achievement. As such, it is likely that comparisons of average test scores across schools are likely to reflect these differences rather than real differences in school performance. Moreover, such comparisons unfairly stack the deck against schools that serve disproportionately high numbers of disadvantaged students.
- Average test scores tend to reflect information about school performance that is grossly out of date. Because they reflect the *cumulative* impact of schooling (in addition to external influences on student achievement) in any given year, average test score indicators can be dominated by information that is years out of date. As a result, such indicators may be virtually useless in evaluating present-day reforms or as an instrument of public accountability.
- Because of widespread student mobility in and out of different schools and districts, average test scores tend to be highly "contaminated" by the influence of multiple educational settings.
- Finally, due to their cumulative character, average test scores fail to localize performance to a specific classroom or grade level, weakening their utility as a means of evaluating reform initiatives or as measures of accountability.

A few states and districts have implemented financial reporting systems and performance measures that overcome the deficiencies described here (see discussion in Chapter III). For the most part, however, SBM programs operate without the ability to track resources to the school and classroom levels and without adequate performance indicators. It is difficult to imagine how any school system—centralized or decentralized—can expect to develop programs that will significantly increase student achievement in the absence of such information.

Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge and skills also must be present throughout school systems to support the effective functioning of SBM reform programs (Lawler, 1986). In particular, employees require:

- Process skills—relevant to the process of sharing in decision making;
- Systems knowledge—pertaining to the overall operation of organizations; and
- Substantive knowledge—relevant to the work in which employees engage.

Process Skills. Training in process skills—i.e., how to organize meetings, develop budgets, resolve conflicts, etc.—is often emphasized during the early implementation of SBM programs, but rarely sustained over the long term. Furthermore, training in these areas is generally limited in scope and typically overlooks the development of analytic skills essential to the continuous improvement of educational programs. If schools are to be held accountable for increasing student performance, school-site decision makers must have the skills necessary to process knowledge and information to produce educationally sound decisions.

All too often, teacher-training activities are pursued as ends in themselves, diverting attention from a broader focus on student achievement goals.

Systems Knowledge. Training in systems knowledge—knowledge pertaining to the overall operation of school systems—receives even less emphasis and often is ignored entirely. As a result, there is a critical need within school systems to see the big picture—"how different parts of the organization interact, how different situations parallel one another because of common underlying structures, how local actions have longer-term and broader impacts than local actors often realize, and why certain operating policies are needed for the system as a whole" (Senge, 1990).

As schools operating under SBM are given greater autonomy to adapt their instructional programs to meet local requirements, differences among schools are likely to become more pronounced, and the need for systems knowledge will grow proportionately. Robert Walker, superintendent of Florida's Monroe County School District—encompassing 13 elementary and secondary schools—already considers the lack of systems thinking and articulation among site-managed schools to be a major problem in his district. As he puts it, "we have 13 feudal states—they dig their moats, erect their towers, and occasionally shout at one another" (Drury & Levin, 1994).

Substantive Knowledge. The professional development programs of most school systems also provide inadequate training in substantive areas of teaching and learning. Typically, training is in the form of discrete workshops or seminars conducted by central office administrators, who not only deliver instruction, but also determine its timing and content. While these activities fulfill state or local requirements for professional learning, they are seldom "deeply rooted in the school curricula or in thoughtful plans to improve teaching and learning" (Cohen & Hill, 1998). Ideally, an analysis of differences between goals for student learning and student performance should drive professional development. All too often, however, teacher-training activities are pursued as ends in themselves, diverting attention from a broader focus on student achievement goals.

It is not surprising, then, that present-day professional development programs have had little impact on student achievement. Indeed, most districts do not even monitor program effectiveness. A recent report by the Education Commission of the States found that none of the districts studied could demonstrate a link between professional development activities and student outcomes. According to the report, "districts knew that a two-day seminar on classroom management was held in October for third-grade teachers at a cost of $25,000 . . . but they did not know if third-grade classrooms were managed any differently or if children learned more as a result of this seminar" (Hertert, 1998).

There is growing consensus within the education community that professional development must transcend the "quick fix" approach characteristic of existing models of pre- and in-service training (Lieberman, 1995). Specifically, professional development programs must begin to engage teachers in inquiry-based, collegial activity, grounded in practice (see Figure 3). This approach is consistent with a broader conceptualization of schools as "learning organizations" (Senge, 1990). According to this perspective, schools must not only disseminate existing knowledge to improve their performance, but also must generate *new* knowledge through experimentation and collaborative inquiry. In this way, professional development becomes inextricably linked to the process of continuous improvement and self-renewal.

While this approach holds great promise, until school districts develop and implement performance measures that can identify the most effective teachers, professional development programs based on modeling and apprentice-protégé relationships are likely to fall short of their objectives. It makes little sense to engage in "sharing knowledge," "observation," "modeling," or "coaching" in the absence of some means of differentiating teachers according to ability. Programs that identify mentor teachers by career stage and years of service are especially vulnerable in this respect, as research has demonstrated that classroom effectiveness bears little relationship to such factors (Adcock, Phillips, & Sipes, 1998;

Haycock, 1998). The lack of appropriate performance indicators also impedes the *creation* of knowledge through collective inquiry and experimentation. Data-driven decision making is an unattainable goal in the absence of reliable outcome data. Under such circumstances, "shared decision making becomes shared naivete at best and shared ignorance at worst" (Guskey & Oldham, 1996).

Professional development that is grounded in practice and engages teachers in collective inquiry and experimentation is crucial to the organizational health of site-managed schools, yet few school systems have developed information systems capable of supporting programs of this type. Thus, it is increasingly clear that the development of modern information systems must precede the transformation of site-managed schools into true learning communities. Furthermore, before new models of professional development can achieve their full potential, they must broaden their scope to include a wider range of process skills—such as analytical thinking, program evaluation skills, etc.—and begin to emphasize knowledge related to the overall functioning of school systems.

FIGURE 3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT WORKS

Researchers Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) have identified a number of characteristics of successful professional development:

- It must engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminate the processes of learning and development.
- It must be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven.
- It must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
- It must be connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students.
- It must be sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice.
- It must be connected to other aspects of school change.

Rewards

Rewards represent another crucial resource for site-managed schools. To serve as a motivational tool, rewards must be carefully aligned with the desired outcomes and strategic needs of the school district. Recognizing the realities of collective bargaining, there are, nevertheless, a number of important points that school boards may wish to consider in tying compensation incentives to professional effectiveness—particularly in schools where teachers have greater autonomy or influence over the instructional program.

In most districts, the base pay of teachers is determined—as it has been for most of the twentieth century—on the basis of two objective criteria: (1) years of experience and (2) training (narrowly defined as the number of academic credits beyond a bachelor's degree). Unfortunately, neither of these criteria has been shown to be a consistent predictor of teachers' classroom performance. Some studies find a positive association between years of service and teacher effectiveness (Adcock & Sipes, 1997; Ferguson, 1991), others find no relationship beyond the first few years of service (Mendro, 1998), and still others report an *inverse* relationship (Adcock et al., 1998).

Evidence concerning the relationship between teacher training and classroom effectiveness is also mixed. A few studies based on district- and school-level data suggest that teacher training is directly related to student performance (e.g., Adcock & Phillips, 1997), and one recent analysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 found a significant positive relationship between teachers' degrees and students' achievement in technical areas (Haycock, 1998). However, other reports find no evidence of a link between training and effectiveness (Hanushek, 1996). To a large degree, the lack of a consistent relationship between teacher training and student achievement reflects the misalignment between the incentives for advanced coursework and ultimate educational objectives. As Darling-Hammond (1996) observes, "course-taking incentives are crudely fashioned and only haphazardly emphasize learning aimed at more insightful teaching."

Attempts to link teachers' compensation to classroom performance as a means of reinforcing broader organizational goals have been largely unsuccessful. Teachers' unions vigorously defend existing wage structures on the grounds that they promote positive working relationships and limit the potential for discriminatory practices. Furthermore, while pay-for-performance plans—such as merit pay—present an aura of accountability to the public, they can fail when (a) competition for rewards overtakes cooperation among teachers, or (b) teachers perceive the distribution of rewards to be unfair, subjective, or unrelated to educational objectives. The first of these obstacles can be overcome by distributing rewards on a schoolwide basis rather than to individual teachers, but the latter presents a more formidable challenge. Most teacher evaluation systems fail to focus on student performance, and those that do generally lack the ability to distinguish individual teachers' contributions to pupils' successes from other school or non-school influences.

Despite enduring interest in merit pay, few school districts provide support for such plans, and success has been limited. Due to budget constraints, awards are typically inconsequential, often totaling less than the cost of a single teacher's salary. Morever, the majority of plans distribute awards on the basis of in-class evaluations or other process data, and no more than one in five link bonuses to educational outcomes (Swanson & King, 1997). Finally, because awards are regularly distributed to the vast majority of a district's teachers, they lose their ability to discriminate among "good" and "bad" teachers. For example, in a recent year, fully 90 percent of teachers in Granville County, North Carolina, earned individual merit pay, and all but two of the district's 12 schools earned schoolwide performance rewards (Gursky, 1992).

Career ladders offer an alternative reward scheme that establishes various levels of responsibility, status, and salary. Unfortunately, these plans suffer many of the same liabilities as merit pay. And yet, if school-based professional development and organizational learning are to succeed, schools must acquire the capacity to identify and reward teachers according to their performance. It is folly to assume that all teachers share common abilities and are capable of contributing equally to the development of professional capacity through peer counseling and other forms of collaborative work. Basing merit pay and career ladder promotions on more objective measures of skills and performance, while simultaneously placing greater emphasis on intrinsic rewards (i.e., release time, greater autonomy, etc.) may help to mitigate some of the more divisive aspects of such plans.

Key Questions:

1. *In your district, how are financial data gathered, analyzed, and reported? At the district level? At the school level?*

2. *How does your district measure school performance? Do performance indicators used in your district accurately gauge the contribution of schools to student achievement and other valued outcomes?*

3. *How effective has your district been in supporting SBM through the development of process skills, systems knowledge, and substantive knowledge at the school level?*

4. *In your district, are teachers and schools rewarded for their performance? Does your district's compensation system differentiate teachers according to their ability?*

5. *To what extent is your district's inability to tie rewards to performance a union issue or a state mandate? Can it be addressed?*

CHAPTER III

Reinventing School-Based Management

Given the mixed purposes of school-based management—e.g., teacher professionalization, democratization, the satisfaction of constituents and public perceptions, etc.—and the limits of its implementation, it is not surprising that this reform has had so little impact on school performance. A lack of clear theoretical direction has contributed to widespread stakeholder resistance, goal displacement, and other obstacles affecting SBM. With all of these shortcomings, some advocates and legislators have taken a narrow view, seeking to "cure" SBM by simply delegating additional power to school sites, while ignoring the broader district context within which schools function. A recently defeated referendum in California exemplifies this approach. Known as Proposition 8, this referendum sought to delegate full budgetary and programmatic authority to school sites, completely overlooking the important role of the school district in supporting and overseeing reform.

In contrast, this report underscores the critical role that school boards and district staff can play, both in transforming SBM and in increasing the capacity of local school districts to ensure its long-term success. In this chapter, existing theoretical perspectives, new insights from the private sector, and the cumulative experience of SBM combine to form the basis for a new approach to site-based decision making—one that places special emphasis on the link between decentralization and school performance. While there is a substantial body of evidence that supports individual aspects of the approach presented here, the proposed model, as a whole, remains untested. School boards are thus advised to evaluate this approach in terms of its theoretical strength, the weight of the evidence, local political realities, and local needs (based on current achievement levels, district size, local interest, etc.).

Although the movement toward strengthening the decision-making capacity of school sites may prove to be an effective strategy, the model discussed here, and similar approaches, should be considered with the following caveats in mind:

- The discussion is about a model, not a proven practice, and, in that respect, this approach should be considered "experimental."

- Success will depend on the willingness of local sites to do the work required of them on a sustained basis, and on the willingness of the school system to fully embrace the model (including providing the resources to build decision-making capabilities at the site level and to support oversight functions at the district level).

- For these reasons, state mandates seeking to implement this model (or similar approaches) on a broad scale would be ill advised at this time.

Toward a Theory of School-Based Improvement

As the name implies, under school-based management, schools are depicted more as "bases for management" than "as centers of renewal" (Sirotnik & Clark, 1988), and, according to some, therein lies the problem. Emphasizing management, instead of improvement, focuses attention on a broad range of activities, many of which are only marginally related to student achievement. In effect, in its present form, SBM puts "form before function" and directs attention away from the central task of schools—teaching and learning (Murphy & Beck, 1995; Weiss & Cambone, 1993).

It seems increasingly clear that the misdirected focus of SBM cannot be redressed simply by "patching up" the current reform. If site-managed schools are to become centers of change and self-renewal, SBM must undergo a complete transformation—in effect, it must be *reinvented.* To emphasize this point, and to distinguish the proposed model from its predecessor, the term "school-based improvement"—or, simply, "SBI"—is used to describe the approach presented for consideration here.

School-based improvement differs from school-based management in several important respects:

- It emphasizes student achievement over governance and administration;

- It is systemic in nature, and, as such, requires the establishment of a district-wide context that promotes school-based change;

- It considers the participation of teachers and parents to be central, rather than peripheral, to the process; and

- It emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement through data-driven decision making.

Setting the Context

An important characteristic of SBI that differentiates it from most SBM programs is its systemic approach to school reform. In current practice, SBM schools often resemble "cottage industries" operating within loose confederations. The role of central authorities—school board members, superintendents, and central office staff—is often overlooked and rarely emphasized. In contrast, under SBI, central authorities play an essential, well-defined, and nurturing role in establishing an environment conducive to school-based change.

School systems implementing SBI should seek to establish three contextual conditions. First, school boards and district staff should engage the community in developing a shared mission that will guide the process of school-based change. Establishing broad consensus around district-level goals and standards is important, both as a means of providing direction to schools and as a way of motivating behavior that supports district-level objectives. Second, district authorities, in alliance with stakeholder representatives, should clearly articulate the structural arrangements that frame participative decision making, a process central to SBI. These arrangements—the composition of school-site councils, voting rules, etc.—should be designed to empower stakeholders and make their participation meaningful. Finally, it is important that central authorities grant schools appropriate decision-making authority or

influence over budget, staffing, and instructional programs, while increasing other crucial resources—i.e., information, knowledge, and incentives—in site-governed schools. (Each of these conditions is discussed in further detail below, under "Establishing the Infrastructure for SBI.")

Teacher and Parent Participation

Despite the rhetoric, authentic participative decision making within the context of SBM is rare. Principals may receive input from other stakeholders, but, more often than not, they make the final decisions. Even when specific decision-making authority is granted to teachers and parents, traditional patterns of influence in school decision making often remain unchanged (Daresh, 1992; Malen et al., 1989).

The marginalization of shared decision making within the context of SBM is in stark contrast to its centrality within the model proposed here. Specifically, the SBI model suggests that stakeholder participation influences school performance through:

- **Teacher commitment and motivation**—Greater participation in school-based decision making is expected to increase teachers' commitment by: (1) increasing their collective autonomy, thus engendering a sense of responsibility for the decisions made; (2) promoting their understanding of the rationale behind decisions; and (3) providing information about how decisions fit with existing practices and potential barriers, therefore increasing the likelihood that decisions will be realistic and feasible (Firestone, 1996).[5]

- **Organizational learning**—By giving teachers and other stakeholders the opportunity to work with others of similar and dissimilar backgrounds, shared decision making also promotes organizational learning (Bandura, 1986).[6]

- **Civic and professional controls**—Finally, to the extent that authentic participative decision making evokes professional and civic controls, greater professional and administrative accountability may result.[7]

Data-Driven Decision Making

Under SBI, continuous improvement through data-driven decision making is central to the organizational life of schools. Continuous improvement is achieved by assessing current needs, developing and implementing a course of action based on available knowledge and information, evaluating the effects, and finally, repeating the process. But moving from a culture where decisions are based on individual perceptions to one in which decisions are based on the objective evaluation of data is not an easy transition to make. As Joyce and Calhoun (1996) point out, "collective inquiry, including the study of teaching and learning, is an innovation that assaults the norms of most schools."

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[5] Involvement in school-based decision making may also increase teachers' *motivation*—directly, by satisfying their need for collective autonomy (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991) and, indirectly, as a by-product of their increased commitment. Finally, district-wide goals that promote shared values, knowledge that leads to rational (rather than intuitive) decisions, and reward systems that are aligned with educational objectives are likely to contribute further to teachers' commitment and motivation.

[6] Where collaboration takes the form of collective inquiry, in which decisions are based on facts rather than opinions, shared decision making is especially likely to give rise to experimentation, critical thinking, and learning. A shared mission, coupled with clearly aligned incentives, may further reinforce organizational learning by maintaining a clear focus on performance objectives.

[7] The strength of professional controls is likely to increase in direct proportion to the availability of information and knowledge, since teachers can be expected to exhibit less resistance to collegial controls when standards of behavior are viewed as rationally determined. Rewards aligned with shared objectives may further reinforce professional controls. While civic controls rely more directly on the traditional oversight role of parents and community members vis-à-vis public schools, they too may be strengthened by the presence of clear goals and resources in the form of information and knowledge. Lay council members can invoke common goals as a source of "moral authority" if their professional counterparts begin to lose focus, and the presence of information and knowledge simplifies control by increasing the pressure to demonstrate a rational basis for collective decisions.

As schools evolve under SBI, they will require higher levels of participation, clearly defined objectives, and sufficient information, knowledge, and incentives to pursue those objectives. In turn, these factors can be expected to influence the quality of decision making by increasing commitment and motivation, organizational learning, and professional and civic controls.

A Model of School-Based Improvement

The model of school-based improvement presented here is summarized in Figure 4. According to this illustration, SBI encourages the involvement of all stakeholders in participatory decision making by developing a broad consensus around district-level goals, specifying explicit structural arrangements that support meaningful participation, and providing school-site decision makers with the authority and essential resources to accomplish their mission. These conditions, in combination with high levels of participation, are hypothesized to produce greater commitment and motivation, organizational learning, and civic and professional controls. In turn, these variables can be expected to influence the quality of the decisions made, ensuring that they are rationally determined. Finally, high levels of teacher commitment and motivation and the presence of strong civic and professional controls increase the likelihood that those decisions will be faithfully implemented.

Of course, the model described here involves many feedback loops not represented in Figure 4. As Lawrence Lezotte (1989) correctly observes, "school improvement is a process, not an event." It involves constant reflection, evaluation, and mid-course corrections. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the process described here will always result in actions that enhance school performance. However, in schools applying this approach, changes to curricular and instructional programs are more likely to be made on the basis of collective inquiry and the evaluation of outcomes, rather than on the whim of any one individual or because of the relative "popularity" of one program over another.

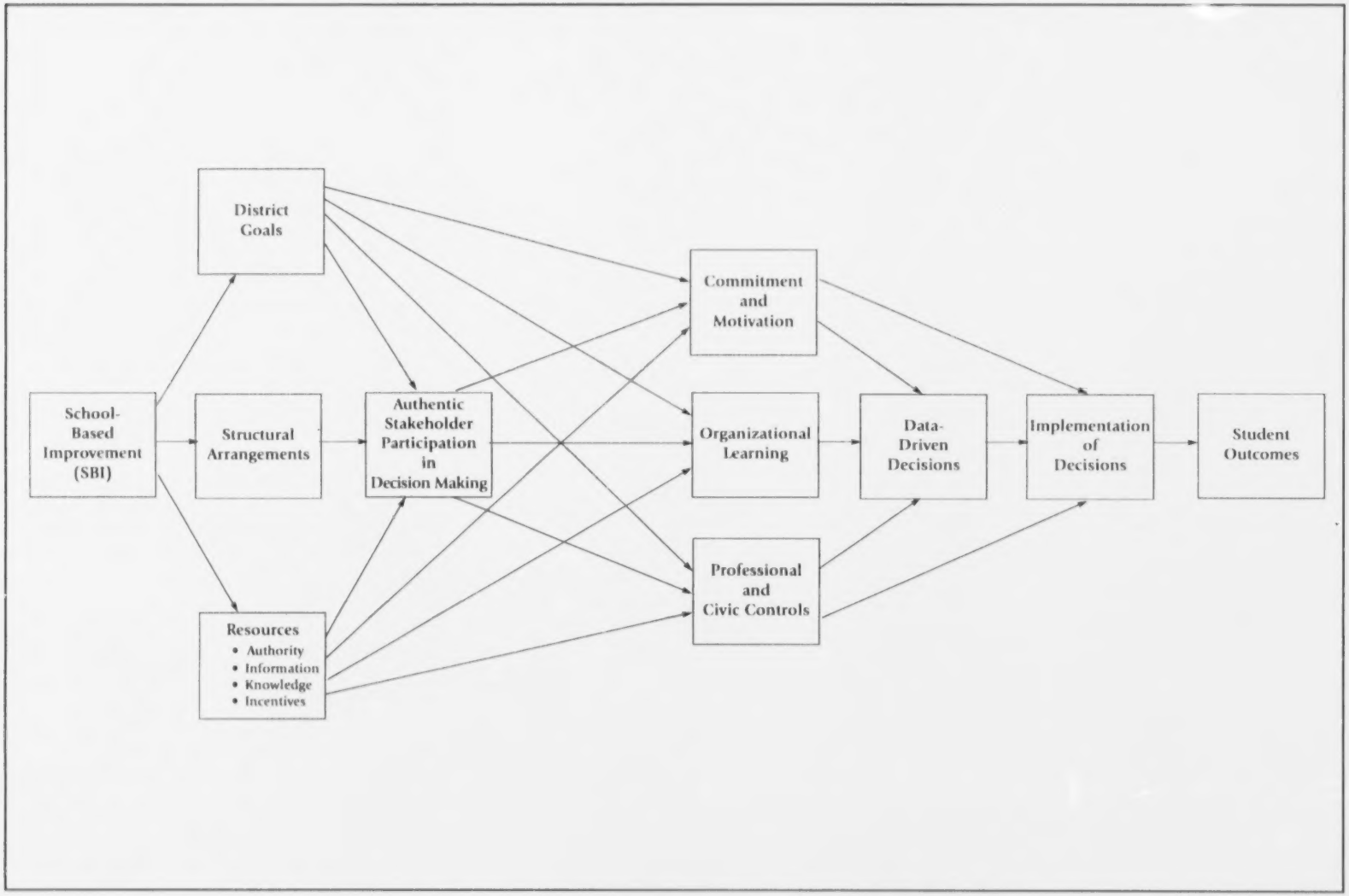
Establishing the Infrastructure for SBI

The focus on individual school autonomy under SBM has tended to overshadow serious consideration of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of central authorities during and after restructuring. As a result, the transition to school-based decision making is often viewed as an isolated innovation, or as one innovation among many, but only rarely as a systemic change process requiring the redefinition and realignment of all elements within the system.

In contrast, the sustained improvements called for under SBI imply the fundamental restructuring of the school, the district, and their interrelationships (Fullan, 1991; Marsh, 1994). Systemic change of this magnitude affects the roles of all constituencies, as well as the structure, governance, and design of teaching and learning. In the redesign of schools, the role of the school district is especially crucial, since district action must establish the conditions that create and sustain the "context" for successful reform. These conditions include:

- The development of a district-wide consensus around student performance objectives;
- The specification of structural arrangements which provide a framework for authentic participative decision making at the school level; and
- The delegation of significant budgetary, staffing, and programmatic authority, coupled with the development of information, knowledge, and incentives at the school site and throughout the organization.

FIGURE 4. A MODEL OF SCHOOL-BASED IMPROVEMENT



A Shared Vision

School systems adopting SBI must begin by acknowledging that student learning is central to their overall mission. Without a clear and common purpose to drive school improvement, SBI becomes operationally irrelevant as a mechanism for increasing the productivity of schools. However, while advocates of school-site governance increasingly agree that a clear and shared mission is essential to school improvement (Peterson et al., 1995), there is much less agreement as to whether such consensus is best achieved at the district or school level. District authorities are understandably reticent to engage in "a radical devolution of authority under which local units set their own goals and objectives," particularly when local goals may be at variance with those promulgated at the district level (Hess, 1992). Consequently, many existing programs of school-based decision making send mixed messages, often requiring schools to develop "shared visions," while simultaneously restricting school-site decision making to narrow operational issues.

Without a clear and common purpose to drive school improvement, SBI becomes operationally irrelevant as a mechanism for increasing the productivity of schools.

Amidst this confusion, the model proposed here is unambiguous in its insistence that consensus around district-level goals—achieved through a process of intense community engagement—is essential to the success of school-based improvement. This does not imply that "action plans," SIPs, and other blueprints for action promulgated at the school level are without relevance. Indeed, these operational statements, particularly when based on a data-driven assessment of needs, represent the logical first step toward innovation and change. However, while individual school sites should have the latitude to determine how to achieve system-wide goals, system change requires substantive direction that emanates from the center. The rationale for determining goals at the district level encompasses many considerations, including:

- Student achievement;
- Equity;
- Organizational learning; and
- Accountability.

Student Achievement. Developing an overarching mission at the district level can help achieve a broad consensus on student achievement goals and galvanize community support for school-based improvement. Maintaining a focus on student achievement is difficult, even at the district level, but endowing schools with the authority to determine their own objectives is a prescription for chaos. A single example illustrates this point well. As part of the School Restructuring Study (SRS) conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS), researchers examined the structures, processes, and outcomes of 24 schools operating under SBM. They found that few of the schools studied had invested the time necessary to develop "a clear, focused, and inspiring vision" and concluded that this pervasive lack of direction had given rise to "fragmented planning" and unfocused decision making (Peterson et al., 1995).

Equity. Goals developed at the district level are also more likely to serve the broader public interest and less likely to give rise to provincialism and inequities across sites. Some observers have voiced concern that certain SBM practices may promote narrow agendas that divide society (Mirel, 1990; Sackney & Dibski, 1992). Others warn that because schools in poor areas are likely to impose lower expectations for achievement than those in more affluent areas, increasing inequality is a "central and virtually inevitable outcome" of decentralization (Watt, 1989). By maintaining strong centralized control over educational objectives—and by aligning performance indicators, accountability systems, and rewards with these objectives—SBI promotes a uniformity of purpose that should serve to counter these trends.

Organizational Learning. District-wide goals and objectives also provide a common basis for comparing the relative effectiveness of programmatic innovations across sites. If schools were granted the authority to determine their own objectives, it would be impossible to compare their performances, and therefore, impossible to judge the relative merits of the instructional programs they might adopt. Although individual sites could continue to make productivity gains by comparing present with past performance and making appropriate programmatic adjustments, the inability to compare the effectiveness of alternative instructional strategies across sites would impede the progress of organizational learning.

Accountability. Finally, centrally determined goals and objectives are essential for the development of system-wide incentive programs and targeted intervention strategies. If performance rewards were distributed to sites based on their achievement of goals established at the local level, school-site personnel would find it in their best interest to scale back their objectives. Any incentive system that bases the distribution of rewards on anything other than a common standard of performance is doomed from the outset. Equally important, universal performance standards, based on system-wide goals, permit central authorities to identify low-achieving schools and, where necessary, to implement appropriate intervention strategies.

Structural Arrangements and Processes

Parent and teacher involvement in decision making is an important aspect of the SBI model, and, therefore, central authorities seeking to implement this approach should carefully assess which structural arrangements and processes best promote meaningful participation. In particular, school boards should consider taking steps to overcome the tendency toward administrative control of school-site decision-making councils. For example, they might consider: (1) prescribing the composition of school-site councils to ensure a greater voice for teachers and parents (because teachers will ultimately drive school-improvement initiatives, boards should consider the merits of granting them a plurality, if not a majority, of council seats); (2) specifying the rules governing the process for selecting school-site council representatives and providing financial support for conducting council elections; (3) mandating staggered terms of office for school-site council representatives to maintain continuity and momentum in school-level decision making; (4) establishing clear council voting procedures and mandating—within the limits of their authority—that all council decisions are binding; (5) specifying the purpose of school-site councils and the roles of individual council members; (6) mandating specific measures to ensure that no individual council member controls the agenda or serves as a "gatekeeper" for information relevant to decision making; and (7) encouraging or prescribing the development of a committee structure designed to broaden participation and reduce the potential for conflict.

In order to ensure that administrative leadership at the site level is compatible with, and responsive to, the educational and operational vision of the council, local school boards also may wish to grant school-site councils more influence in the hiring, evaluation, and continuation of school administrators.[8] Public support for such a measure has grown significantly over the past several years, and today, fully 55 percent of Americans feel that parents of public school students should have more say in the selection and hiring of administrators and principals (Rose & Gallup, 1998).

[8] Some observers question whether empowering school-site councils in this way would actually alter the balance of power within schools. Indeed, several recent studies of a targeted sample of Chicago elementary schools reveal a high incidence of "consolidated principal power"—about 40 percent of the schools examined—despite the fact that, in Chicago, local school councils are empowered to select and hire principals for four-year terms (Hess, 1994). But these studies tend to rely upon methodologies that are ill suited for the detection of stakeholder influence. In the absence of studies employing more appropriate methodologies, it is impossible to determine the true effects of endowing parents and teachers with the authority to hire and fire principals. However, there is little reason to believe that principals should be any less responsive to such influence than the CEOs of other organizations (though, admittedly, corporate boards are not comprised of a significant number of employees, nor do they include members of the general public who may lack relevant expertise).

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School administrators justly complain that, under shared decision making, they are asked to share authority, but not responsibility.

A process change of this magnitude is, perhaps, best contemplated in combination with other measures designed to broaden accountability at the school level. It would be unfair to grant teachers a voice in the selection of principals without implementing parallel measures aimed at increasing their own sense of accountability. Already, school administrators justly complain that, under shared decision making, they are asked to share authority, but not responsibility. (See "Rewards/Accountability," below, for proposals designed to increase teacher accountability.) Furthermore, as pointed out elsewhere, simply shifting the locus of decision making in this and other areas is not likely to enhance school performance unless accompanied by the ongoing commitment of participants, their preparation for site management, and adequate knowledge, data, and other key resources at the site level.

Crucial Resources

The final element in establishing an infrastructure conducive to school-based change involves the delegation of decision-making authority to schools and the development of other crucial resources—i.e., information, knowledge, and incentives—at the site and system levels. If the proposed model of school-based improvement is to be taken seriously by school-site decision makers, central authorities must devolve significant authority to schools in several key functional areas. In addition, school districts must be willing and able to take steps to develop the information, knowledge, and incentives necessary to support and sustain high-performance schools.

Site-Level Influence over Decision Making. Ideally, districts implementing SBI would grant schools greater authority or influence over their own budgets, the selection of staff, and the design and implementation of educational programs (consistent with district-wide objectives). Of course, legal restrictions and local political realities may limit the degree of authority that can be devolved in these areas.

Budgetary Decisions: Districts may grant schools greater budgetary authority either in a single step or in phases. In either case, districts should determine which functions would remain centralized (e.g., building construction, technology infrastructure, etc.), and which functions would come under the control of school sites (Odden & Busch, 1998). Following this determination, districts could then simply allocate funds not required for the fulfillment of centralized functions to school sites, preferably in the form of lump-sum allocations based on a specific, per-student distribution. Additional adjustments reflecting school size, grade level, and special programs, as well as adjustments for higher-than-average personnel costs, may be required to ensure an equitable distribution of funds.

Upon receiving its allocation, each site would develop a detailed budget, within the context of its school improvement plan and in compliance with district, state, and federal laws. Schools would have maximum flexibility to transfer funds among budget categories, to purchase goods and services from internal and external sources, and to carry over funds from one year to the next. The approval of site-based budgets would remain within the purview of the school board, but, under the SBI approach, district oversight would be directed more toward ensuring each site's consistency with the district's vision, standards, policies, and legal requirements and less toward the details of each site's educational plan. In addition, it would be the district's role to provide information and technical assistance to schools and, together with school-site decision makers, to monitor expenditures to ensure that schools do not exceed their spending authorizations.

FIGURE 5. ESTABLISHING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SCHOOL-BASED IMPROVEMENT

School-based improvement (SBI) is a systemic reform that emphasizes continuous improvement through data-driven decision making. It requires fundamental restructuring and affects the roles of all constituencies. In addition to establishing a proactive oversight role to authorize, support, and evaluate site performance, district leaders can establish an infrastructure that supports SBI by:

- *Engaging the community in developing a shared district mission;*
- *Specifying explicit structural arrangements that support meaningful participation; and*
- *Providing school-site decision makers with the authority and resources to accomplish their mission.*

Engaging the Community in a Shared Mission

Basing SBI on district-level, rather than school-level, goals allows for:

- Consistent focus on student achievement;
- Equity of resources from school to school;
- Common basis for evaluating the effectiveness of individual programs; and
- System-wide incentives and intervention strategies.

Specifying Structural Arrangements

Clarifying the composition and structure of school-site councils and the rules that govern their functioning helps to avoid role confusion and encourages buy-in on the part of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. For example:

- School-site councils should give both teachers and parents a substantial voice in decision making;
- The process for selecting council representatives, including voting procedures, should be clearly specified; and
- School-site councils could participate in the selection, evaluation, and continuation of principals at the site.

Providing Authority and Resources

The success of SBI depends on the delegation of decision making to schools and the development of crucial resources at the site and system levels. This may include the extent to which:

- Schools would have the discretion to develop their own budgets, select their own staff, and design and implement educational programs consistent with district goals;
- Districts would develop performance indicators that gauge the contribution of individual schools, programs, curricula, and teachers to student achievement;
- Schools would have access to accounting information that links individual schools, programs, and classrooms;
- Districts would support professional development for teachers;
- Districts would disseminate ideas and experiences among individual schools;
- Districts would align reward systems with broader organizational objectives by developing performance-based compensation programs; and
- The school board and central administration would be prepared to intervene and help struggling schools.

Staffing Decisions: Districts implementing SBI may choose to screen potential employees for state certification and other qualifications, but, within the limitations imposed by state law and collective bargaining agreements, the selection of new professional and support staff should rest with school principals and school-site councils. In addition, school boards may wish to grant schools more involvement in the process of selecting administrative staff. This would likely strengthen administrative accountability and provide for more authentic participation of teachers and parents in school-site councils. In either case, districts can reduce their legal exposure by specifying the criteria that govern the staff selection process.

Programmatic Decisions: Schools operating under SBI also will require sufficient authority to shape their own instructional programs. Under the model proposed here, district authorities would have responsibility for establishing a broad framework of goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, while schools would have responsibility for determining the appropriate means of achieving those ends. Although schools may draw upon central resources in developing their instructional programs, policies concerning the grouping of students, pedagogical approaches, textbook selection, and curricula should—with few exceptions—be decided at the school level. Central authorities should review school improvement plans (SIPs) to ensure their compliance with state law and collective bargaining agreements, but, in the absence of strong justification, matters of educational substance should not be overturned.

Information. Information—especially that pertaining to organizational performance and the flow of resources—is essential to data-driven decision making and the operation of high-performance schools. In the absence of reliable and valid outcome data, it is impossible to compare the effectiveness of schools, programs, curricula, or teachers, and, without detailed information on resource flows, schools can never hope to maximize the efficiency of their operations. Unfortunately, many school systems operate with information systems that are wholly inadequate—they are, in a very real sense, like ships without rudders.

Many school systems operate with information systems that are wholly inadequate—they are, in a very real sense, like ships without rudders.

To establish an information infrastructure that supports SBI, school districts should develop performance indicators that accurately gauge the contribution of individual schools, programs, curricula, and teachers to student achievement. For the reasons alluded to earlier in this report, the use of mean test score comparisons for such purposes is inadequate and should be supplemented, if not replaced, by performance measures based on the "value-added" approach (Meyer, 1996). Value-added assessment—currently employed in Tennessee, Dallas, and a few other school systems—adjusts school or classroom average test score gains at each grade level to remove the effects of non-school factors on achievement. In conjunction with other criteria, the resulting measures provide an accurate and equitable basis for evaluating programmatic interventions, rewarding high-performing schools, providing support to struggling schools, and rewarding teachers—both individually and in teams—for their productivity. Changing just this aspect of education information systems would greatly facilitate the expansion of knowledge and provide the basis for performance-based rewards and district-wide systems of accountability.

But performance data and related information cannot drive school improvement efforts if they are not easily accessible to school-site decision makers. In particular, decision-making teams must have the ability to disaggregate student performance data by background characteristics and other variables to effectively evaluate the impact of programmatic innovations on all students. The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) has responded to this critical need with the development of the Quality School Portfolio (QSP), a school-based resources kit and information manager that disaggregates student data by up to six variable categories and produces easy-to-read reports using several standard templates. The QSP provides schools with the ability to import data from a variety of sources and includes utilities for gathering data on students, teachers, and school climate. Under SBI, tools such as the QSP will become indispensable in refining existing instructional programs and in assessing the effectiveness of new school-based initiatives.

In order to make cost-effective decisions, schools operating under SBI also must have access to a continuous flow of accounting information that links expenditures to individual schools, programs, and classrooms. David (1994) found that the lack of appropriate accounting systems and technical support to schools constituted a major obstacle to the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Fortunately, new accounting systems that effectively deal with such problems are now available. For example, one new technology-based management information tool, called the Finance Analysis Model (Speakman et al., 1997), provides a dynamic relational database that compiles information on district and school expenditures in three dimensions: function, program, and grade level. The availability of information related to the structure, expenditures, and uses of funds in school systems and individual schools should significantly increase the potential for effective SBI programs.

Schools operating under SBI also must have access to a continuous flow of accounting information that links expenditures to individual schools, programs, and classrooms.

In addition to value-added performance indicators and accounting information that links expenditures to individual schools, programs, and classrooms, Odden (1998) has suggested several other components of a modern school-based information system:

- An electronic purchasing/invoicing system;
- An instructional management system for monitoring student performance relative to performance standards;
- Descriptions of best practices—e.g., curriculum units, instructional approaches, professional development strategies, etc.; and
- A personnel records system for teaching, professional, and classified staff.

Knowledge. A lack of appropriate performance indicators and modern information systems has contributed greatly to the knowledge deficiencies found in many public school systems. Districts can support the development of teachers' substantive knowledge in several ways, and may wish to consider:

- Creating career ladders that differentiate teachers by performance level;
- "Buying time" to support collaborative professional work; and
- Supporting the creation of professional development academies and other extra-school forums that emphasize academic content.

The traditional model of professional development tends to emphasize the acquisition of distinct "units" of knowledge that are seldom reinforced through actual classroom experience. While newer approaches to teacher training acknowledge the importance of linking professional development to practical experience, these efforts can be counterproductive. Thus, Little (1990) raises fundamental questions when she asks:

> Bluntly put, do we have in teachers' collaborative work the creative development of well-informed choices or the mutual reinforcement of poorly informed habit? Does teachers' time together advance the understanding and imagination they bring to their work or do teachers merely confirm one another in present practice?

Obviously, some means of differentiating teachers by ability is required if school-based professional development is to have maximum impact on student achievement. Teachers can learn from one anoth-

er most effectively in settings where skilled teachers can instruct and oversee the development of less skilled teachers. Using value-added performance measures and other indicators of teaching ability could help ensure that those teachers with the highest demonstrated ability are placed in "lead teacher" and "mentor" positions.

The kind of school-based professional development envisioned under SBI will require significant blocks of time for teachers to engage in collaborative work, observation, critique, and reflection. Central authorities should make it a high priority to provide sufficient time for staff development activities of this kind. Naturally, to the extent that these types of activities expand teachers' actual work days, school boards will need to consider the salary implications involved. Yet, as Firestone (1996) observes, "collegial interaction [will not] allow teachers to share knowledge they do not have." Externally based staff development will thus play an important role in the dissemination of knowledge, even in the context of SBI.

In addition to creating opportunities for the development of teachers' substantive knowledge through training and classroom experience, central authorities should also create opportunities for school-site decision makers to learn various process skills necessary for effective decision making. In particular, under SBI, analytical, statistical, and evaluative skills should be emphasized. As Peterson et al. (1995) observed in their analysis of 24 site-managed schools, "the knowledge base [of school-site decision makers] appeared to be intuitive rather than based on research." Districts cannot simply provide information to local stakeholders and expect positive results—they must also provide opportunities for training in the use of these data.

Accountability, under SBI, would be largely self-regulating, based on a system of performance-based rewards, professional controls, and local civic oversight.

Finally, central authorities should take steps to promote greater systems knowledge. As Marsh (1994) points out, "school leaders need a deep understanding of the purposes and 'connectedness' of schools." This need may be greatest in a decentralized system, where increasing differentiation can impede articulation among units. By conducting comparative analyses across school sites, central office staff can contribute significantly to the systems knowledge base of the district, identifying best practices, effective curricula, and successful instructional programs. Networks of work-alike and cross-role teams also offer an effective means of building systems knowledge.

Rewards/Accountability. If schools and school systems are to undergo the kind of systemic change envisioned under SBI, reward systems must be carefully aligned to reinforce broader organizational objectives. In particular, consideration should be given to designing compensation or other extrinsic/intrinsic rewards that will promote organizational performance and reinforce norms of collegiality, cooperation, and continuous learning.

Unfortunately, because most districts base compensation on a teacher's years of service and graduate course work, current reward systems offer virtually no incentive for teachers to increase their productivity (as individuals or teams), engage in cooperative work, or develop skills relevant to organizational performance. Furthermore, because present-day pay practices seldom differentiate teachers by ability, in most school systems, there is no structural basis for establishing the kind of mentor-protégé relationships that could facilitate school-based staff development.

Local variation in district size, union strength, and other factors will inevitably influence each district's approach to the development of its compensation program. However, school boards should consider the merits of compensation systems that: (1) reward teachers for actual classroom performance (i.e., on the basis of value-added indicators of teacher effectiveness); and (2) differentiate, compensate, and recognize teachers according to their ability and their contribution to overall organizational performance (e.g., mentoring other teachers). School administrators also should be rewarded on the basis of their performance, as well as for their leadership (e.g., their contribution to the creation of an effective team).

Accountability, under SBI, would be largely self-regulating, based on a system of performance-based rewards, professional controls, and local civic oversight. But no system is foolproof, and ultimately, district-level policymakers will be held accountable for the effective and equitable functioning of all schools. District authorities must, therefore, be prepared to intervene and provide supplemental assistance to struggling schools, and where these efforts fail, provide greater central oversight. But it is important to recall that, more than any other factor, the productivity of individual teachers determines the effectiveness of the schools in which they work (Bembrey, Jordon, Gomez, Anderson, & Mendro, 1998). Thus, while district authorities should consider intensive staff development and other interventions when dealing with struggling schools, they may also wish to develop strategies and incentives to attract the most effective teachers to the most challenging schools.

In successful schools, "the mission for learning was powerful enough to guide instruction, but also flexible enough to encourage debate, discussion, and experimentation."

The State of the Evidence

The school-based improvement model proposed here has not been tested in its entirety and, as such, it should be regarded as experimental. However, many individual aspects of the approach have been investigated, and researchers have reported findings that, for the most part, are encouraging. There are, moreover, significant parallels between the SBI model and the comprehensive School Development Program developed by Comer (1980), an approach that is regarded by many as effective in raising student achievement. Finally, a recent report issued by the National Education Goals Panel identifies Texas and North Carolina as leaders in student achievement and attributes their success to a policy environment that creates an infrastructure strikingly similiar to the distict-wide context proposed under SBI. Of course, state-level policies are likely to be less reflective of local needs and priorities than those promulgated at the local level.

School-based improvement emphasizes four critical features in the redesign of school-level decision making: (1) a focus on achievement goals; (2) the establishment of a district-wide context that promotes school-based change; (3) the authentic participation of teachers and parents in the decision-making process; and (4) continuous improvement through data-driven decision making. Evidence of the role that these key elements play in promoting student learning dates back to the literature on school effectiveness and reform implementation. These early studies demonstrated the importance of a common purpose and clear goals (Edmonds, 1981; Tomlinson, 1980), district support for school-based change (Hersh, Carnine, Gall, Stockard, Carmack, & Gannon, 1981), teacher involvement in collaborative planning (Hunter, 1979; Levine & Stark, 1981), and the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of programmatic innovations (Hawley, 1978; McLaughlin, 1978).

More recent investigations further corroborate the SBI approach. For example, several studies conducted at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) underscore the critical role that shared educational goals play in guiding innovation and change (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). CORS researchers report that, in successful schools, "the mission for learning was powerful enough to guide instruction, but also flexible enough to encourage debate, discussion, and experimentation." They also report evidence linking authentic stakeholder participation to improved student outcomes. In an analysis of some 800 high schools, students in schools where teachers exercised high levels of collective responsibility for student learning scored dramatically higher (116 percent) than their counterparts in schools where collective responsibility was low. Another study, by Smylie, Lazarus, and Brownlee-Conyers (1996), employs a sophisticated longitudinal design to examine the instructional outcomes of participative decision making. These researchers conclude that "teacher participation in school-based decision making is related positively to instructional improvement and to student academic outcomes." Finally, in a comprehensive review of more than 80 empirical studies published through 1995, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) demonstrate a convincing pattern of association between teacher participation and increased commitment, morale, and accountability.

Other studies emphasize the importance of the use of data to drive school-improvement initiatives. In Johnson City, New York, for example, where data-driven decision making and continuous self-examination have become an integral part of the district culture, an analysis of student test scores demonstrates consistent improvement over a 15-year period (Schmoker & Wilson, 1993). Yet reports of schools adopting data-based improvement strategies in the absence of strong environmental supports underscore the potential for school districts to make a critical difference in promoting successful school-based change. For example, Joyce and Calhoun (1996) conclude that the importance of external assistance to site-based decision makers is so great that "fairly accurate predictions of success" can be made based on whether or not schools reach out and find such support.

While no existing program of school restructuring incorporates every element of the SBI model, Comer's (1980) School Development Program (SDP) has more in common with this approach than any other comprehensive school reform. Thus, it is significant that a recent evaluation of several innovative programs identified the SDP as one of only two approaches for which there is convincing evidence of a positive effect on student achievement (Stringfield, Millsap, Herman, Yoder, Brigham, Nesselrodt, Schaffer, Karweit, Levin, & Stevens, 1997). The SDP philosophy emphasizes clear goals created collaboratively by all interested stakeholders, the development of patterns of shared responsibility and decision making among parents and staff, and ongoing evaluation and assessment of the school program. But, unlike SBI, the Comer model does not emphasize the importance of aligning rewards with educational objectives, nor does it stress the contributions and roles of the district administration and school board.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence to date in support of the SBI approach is contained in a recent report issued by the National Education Goals Panel (Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998). Annually, the Goals Panel tracks and reports on some 33 indicators linked to the eight National Education Goals. In its most recent report, two states—North Carolina and Texas—stood out for realizing positive gains on the greatest number of indicators, including the largest average gains in student scores on the tests of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered from 1990 to 1997. After discounting various competing explanations for the achievement gains reported for these states—i.e., variation in per-pupil spending, teacher/pupil ratios, and teacher training and experience—the study concluded that "the most plausible explanation for the test score gains" is found in a policy environment that includes the following elements:

- Local control and flexibility for administrators and teachers (unnecessarily restrictive statutes governing schools and teaching were repealed);
- Accountability systems with consequences for results (test score gains are employed as the primary means of ranking schools and schools are rewarded for improved performance);
- State-wide assessments closely linked to academic standards (assessments are conducted annually in every grade from 3 to 8 in reading and math); and
- Data for continuous improvement (student test score data and other information are provided to students, parents, teachers, and school districts through sophisticated computer-based information systems).

The parallels between these key elements and those emphasized by SBI are striking. However, because the Goals Panel report examines state-level data, it quite naturally focuses on the role of the state in creating a supportive policy environment. In contrast, SBI places greater emphasis on the role of *district* policies in establishing a context conducive to the development of high-performance schools. It is at the district level that authorities can best evaluate local readiness, capacity, and commitment to initiate and sustain SBI and, for these reasons, local policies have the greatest potential to positively impact school performance.

CHAPTER IV

The Role of the School Board

More than any other factor, it is the role of the school board and other central authorities that distinguishes the model presented in this report from previous incarnations of decentralized decision making in public education. All too often, advocates of decentralized decision making portray the school board and central office as centers of authority from which decision making should be transferred, while making only vague references to other functions these centers might fulfill. This perspective reveals a lack of appreciation for the potentially constructive role that the central system can play in ensuring successful programs of decentralization.

This chapter explores the school board's role within the context of the SBI model. While much of the discussion deals with the important *internal* role that the school board can play in terms of leadership, substantive support, and accountability, a few preliminary comments concerning the board's external role—as a bridge between SBI and the larger community—are in order.

Local school boards are the only entities within the school district that represent all constituents in the community, including parents, business people, civic leaders, and taxpayers. Across the nation, the vast majority (96 percent) of school board members are elected, and the remainder are appointed by elected officials (e.g., mayors and county commissioners). Consequently, school boards, more than any other authority, represent the broader values, educational goals and needs, and financial trust of the community at large. Moreover, they are both legally and politically accountable to the communities they serve.

Even in those instances where parents and other stakeholders are elected to school-site decision-making bodies, eligibility for membership, method of selection, and lack of legal accountability may disenfranchise segments of the broader community (70 percent of whom have no children in the local schools). Furthermore, council activities, as compared with those of school boards, are limited in terms of their public visibility. Quite apart from their substantive role, school boards lend credibility to the school system in a manner that even the most effective and publicly oriented site councils cannot.

Under SBI, school boards would continue to fulfill many of their traditional functions, including those related to districts' legal, financial, and public accountability (see Figure 6). Although school sites would become more self-directed, school boards would still play a pivotal role, developing strategies to ensure district-wide accountability and promoting the effectiveness of individual school sites. For example, boards might establish policies to determine:

- Which conditions should be present at the site level prior to initiating SBI;
- Which district-wide educational standards and policies would apply to school sites;
- What limits should be placed on schools' discretion in various functional areas;
- What kinds of centralized support and services would be available to school sites (and what resources sites might obtain from outside providers);
- What processes should be adopted to provide for site-plan approvals, oversight, and accountability; and
- What circumstances should trigger district-level intervention in school-site operations or the curtailment of local discretion in certain areas.

School boards operating within this framework are likely to find themselves focusing more of their attention on the relative performance of individual schools than they have in the past. Accordingly, they may require additional information—i.e., research data, best practices, etc.—relevant to school-site performance (derived from external sources as well as from cross-site comparisons). In essence, the role of the board may shift from one of developing polices that will affect all schools uniformly, to one of more actively reviewing site performance and selectively providing support on the basis of perceived needs.

Advocates of SBM have focused on school autonomy and power relations at the school site and, thus, have tended to ignore the role of school boards and other central actors. In contrast, SBI presents a systemic approach to education reform that explicitly acknowledges the importance of district-level policies in establishing an infrastructure conducive to school-based change. In addition to providing district-wide oversight and accountability, school boards should consider how they best can:

- Develop a shared vision to guide SBI;
- Provide a structure that gives a meaningful voice to all stakeholders; and
- Delegate the necessary authority to schools and develop other crucial resources—i.e., information, knowledge, and incentives—while ensuring a proper level of oversight and accountability.

A Shared Vision

School boards seeking to implement SBI must assert their leadership in establishing student learning as the central purpose of schools and in developing a shared vision that will guide the process of school-based change. This will require an intensive program of civic engagement, designed to educate the broader community while simultaneously responding to its concerns. The creation of a district-wide committee of teachers, principals, central office administrators, parents, and community members may be the most effective means of facilitating this process.

While visions will vary from district to district, school boards should establish a framework that emphasizes student achievement, authentic stakeholder participation, and data-driven decision making. In addition to a broad statement of goals and principles, an effective district-wide vision should include

FIGURE 6. SBI AND THE "FOUR PILLARS" OF THE SCHOOL BOARD'S ROLE

In Raising the Bar: A School Board Primer on Student Achievement, *Bracey and Resnick (1998) identify "four pillars" of the school board's role in advancing student achievement, each of which is especially relevant in defining the board's role in developing and supporting school-based improvement initiatives: (1) vision setting; (2) establishing a successful learning environment; (3) exercising accountability for results; and (4) using advocacy to build support.*

Vision Setting

School boards must take the initiative in guiding the process of establishing a district-wide vision of education that emphasizes student learning and school-based improvement. Under the SBI model, board leadership in this area is especially crucial. It is essential that all schools in a given district share common understandings concerning ultimate educational objectives, content standards, and measures of success. The district-level vision is the glue that binds individual school sites together in a broader system of education, and school boards, as representatives of the community and taxpayers, must assume leadership in this endeavor.

Establishing a Successful Learning Environment

If SBI is to achieve its potential, school boards must establish successful learning environments. In particular, local boards must provide the structures, programs, and resources that will nourish and sustain quality decision making and continuous improvement at the school level. Structures, programs, and resources that met the "institutional" needs of education systems in the past must be completely overhauled to meet the demands of high-performance schools operating under SBI.

Exercising Accountability

School boards have an important role in determining the ways in which success and failure will be assessed and in establishing systems of rewards and consequences. In particular, it is the school board's responsibility to ensure that performance indicators are fair, well understood, and reflect district-wide educational objectives.

Using Advocacy to Build Support

School boards must serve as the bridge between schools and the local community. As chief advocates for raising student achievement through school-based improvement, school boards should seek the involvement, understanding, and support of the local community and of state and federal policymakers. The SBI model implies deep, systemic change that can be achieved only with the full support and cooperation of all stakeholders in the community. School boards must take the lead in galvanizing this support. They also must assert their leadership in advocating state and federal policies that support student achievement and school-based improvement.

School boards seeking to implement SBI must assert their leadership in establishing student learning as the central purpose of schools.

specific standards upon which teacher, school, and district performance will be based. Other goals of interest to the community—e.g., increasing students' civic responsibility or promoting racial/ethnic harmony in schools—may be part of a school system's overall mission, but boards should seek to ensure that these goals do not displace student learning as the district's primary objective.

School boards should place special emphasis on engaging the business community, as well as civic and social groups, in developing SBI initiatives. The SBI model is based, in part, on high-involvement management strategies that have proven effective in the private sector, and school systems have much to gain by emulating these practices. Moreover, business and community leaders can provide invaluable support in helping craft the district's strategic plan for improvement, forging compromises, enabling passage of required legislation, funding programs (e.g., school performance awards), and training teachers and administrators in various process skills essential to effective decision making.

Structural Arrangements and Processes

The lack of authentic participative decision making at the school level has been identified as a major drawback of many SBM programs. Thus, districts implementing SBI should establish specific structures and processes that promote the meaningful participation of teachers and parents in school-site decision making.[9] Specifically, school boards should consider:

- Prescribing the composition, selection process, roles, and responsibilities of school-site council members as well as mechanisms to ensure broad community participation in council activities;
- Specifying the purpose of school-site councils, with particular emphasis on their role in effecting school-based improvement through data-driven decision making;
- Providing support designed to improve the knowledge base, judgment, and process skills of site decision makers; and
- Determining the level of influence that sites will have over the hiring, evaluation, and continuation of school administrators.

Developing Resource Capacity

School board leadership in developing the resource capacity of individual schools is equally important to the successful implementation of SBI. School boards should determine the nature and extent of the authority sites will need in the areas of budget development, staff selection, and educational programs. Additionally, they should develop appropriate strategies for creating the resources—information, knowledge, and rewards—that schools need to make quality decisions in these areas and to motivate staff to faithfully implement those decisions.

[9] Under SBI, the participation of parents and community members in school-site decision making is viewed, not as an alternative to school board governance but, rather, as a mechanism for ensuring that school-based decisions reflect local priorities and values. Although represented on school-site councils, parents and community members may wish to bring complaints or concerns to the attention of local boards, and boards should take appropriate action to resolve these matters.

FIGURE 7. THE SCHOOL BOARD'S ROLE IN SBI

Overall Function

The overall school board function may take on new responsibilities, including determining:

- Which conditions should be present at the site level prior to initiating SBI;
- Which district-wide educational standards and policies would apply to the school sites;
- What limits should be placed on schools' discretion in various functional areas;
- What kinds of centralized support and services would be available to school sites (and what resources sites could obtain from outside providers);
- What processes should be adopted to provide for site-plan approvals, oversight, and accountability; and
- What circumstances should trigger district-level intervention in school-site operations or the curtailment of local discretion in certain areas.

Shared Vision

Through intensive civic engagement, the school board should take the leadership role in developing a shared vision for the district. That vision should include:

- Focus on student learning as the central purpose of schools;
- Agreement on specific standards on which teacher, school, and district performance would be based;
- Agreement on the specific content of performance indicators; and
- Agreement on other goals of interest to the community, such as increasing students' civic responsibility.

Structural Arrangements

The school board should promote the meaningful participation of teachers and parents in school-site decision making by:

- Ensuring that teachers and parents are well represented on school-site councils;
- Specifying rules governing the election of council members and the operation of the councils; and
- Specifying the purpose and powers of the councils and the roles of council members.

Resource Capacity

The school board should develop the resource capacity of individual schools by:

- Delegating more discretion for budget, staffing, and educational programming to the local schools;
- Providing performance data and financial data on which local schools can base decisions; and
- Promoting knowledge and skills for teachers through a range of strategies, such as engagement in reflective and collaborative work, supporting the creation of professional development academies, identifying and disseminating best teachers' practices, and creating incentive programs that differentiate teachers by performance level.

Rewards and Accountability

The board should determine the basis for success or failure and develop intervention strategies to assist struggling schools. The school board also should consider how the compensation system can be designed to promote organizational performance, cooperation, and continuous learning.

Increasing Site Discretion

The degree of authority and flexibility that districts can delegate to school-site decision makers is, of course, a function of the degree of authority that states grant to local school districts and the restrictions that states impose on their power to delegate. Without enabling legislation, many school districts simply may not be able to engage in school-based improvement as defined in this report. In such cases, school boards may wish to seek additional authority to implement specific aspects of SBI (e.g., staff selection, teacher assignment, etc.).

School boards adopting this approach should review board policies and central office regulations to ensure that any unintended obstacles to the implementation of SBI are adequately addressed. Finally, because ultimate responsibility for the effective functioning of local schools rests with school boards, they should limit their legal exposure by mandating specific policies to ensure compliance with state and federal laws. In no case should a school board embark upon the implementation of SBI unaided by legal counsel.

Budget. Schools operating under SBI are likely to require additional budgetary discretion. That discretion may be delegated to schools in a single step or in phases, but, in either case, school boards should consider the following:

- Which functions will remain centralized (e.g., building construction, information services, accountability systems, technical support, etc.) and which will come under the control of school sites (e.g., staffing, instructional programs, etc.);
- How best to allocate funds not required for the fulfillment of centralized functions to school sites (e.g., lump-sum allocations based on a specific, per-student distribution);
- How to increase the flexibility of sites to transfer funds among budget categories, to purchase goods and services from internal and external sources, and to carry over funds from one year to the next;
- The process by which boards should review school-site budgets to ensure compliance with state and federal legal requirements (see "Instructional Program," below, for a discussion of the role of school boards in reviewing SIPs); and
- The kinds of information and assistance that school-site decision makers will need to make sound decisions and monitor expenditures in their areas of budgetary responsibility.

Staffing. Schools operating under SBI also may require additional influence or authority over the selection of staff and the definition of staffing needs in order to accomplish district objectives. In districts with collective bargaining, school boards can play a critical role by negotiating contracts that balance the elimination of seniority clauses and other restrictive language with the numerous benefits that accrue to teachers under SBI (e.g., greater voice in decision making, enhanced professional development, merit pay, etc.).

Within the constraints of existing collective bargaining agreements and state legal requirements, school boards should determine the degree of authority they wish to delegate to school sites over the selection and hiring of staff. For example, boards may wish to grant schools the authority to hire their own administrators. Whatever their determination, boards can reduce their legal exposure by:

- Conducting initial screening of applicants for administrative and non-administrative positions;
- Specifying the criteria that govern the staff selection process; and
- Maintaining school district policies that meet legal requirements, including those relating to equal employment opportunities, civil rights laws, and labor standards.

Instructional Program. Finally, schools operating under SBI must have sufficient discretion to shape their own instructional programs to meet district-wide achievement objectives. Within the limits of state legal requirements (and a district's overarching vision), school board policies can be crafted to broaden and shape the flexibility of school sites in such areas as the grouping of students, pedagogical approaches, and textbook selection. At the same time, however, school boards may wish to establish performance objectives for individual sites that are consistent with the district's broader vision.

Central authorities should review school improvement plans (SIPs) for legal compliance (e.g., employee rights, contract development, student rights, etc.), matters pertaining to district-wide articulation, and similar concerns. However, in the absence of strong justification, an SIP that presents an operational plan within the framework of the district's policies, vision, and accountability system should not be rejected solely on substantive grounds. Such action could undermine school-based decision making and may limit the ability of schools to introduce new programs that address the particular needs of the students they serve. To the maximum degree possible, under SBI, schools should be evaluated in terms of outcomes, not process.

Information

Information—especially that pertaining to organizational performance and the flow of resources—is essential for rational decision making and school-based improvement. In many districts, schools already have access to a vast array of data, but, because of the way these data are reported, they provide little in the way of useful information. Performance data are generally reported as averages (rather than as gains), often fail to distinguish between school and non-school-related outcomes, and only rarely reflect performance at the classroom level. Similarly, financial data seldom track the flow of resources to the school and classroom levels. Without such information, schools cannot maximize their efficiency, nor can they evaluate the relative effectiveness of individual programs or teachers. This, in turn, impedes organizational learning and inhibits the development of reward systems aligned with performance objectives.

Information is the driving force behind school-based change and, thus, should represent the central concern of school boards seeking to implement SBI.

In a very real sense, information is the driving force behind school-based change and, thus, should represent the central concern of school boards seeking to implement SBI. Specifically, school boards should consider taking action in the following areas:

- Assess student achievement annually at every grade level, using achievement tests that are aligned with district-wide performance objectives;
- Develop value-added performance indicators that remove the effects of non-school factors on achievement;
- Report value-added assessment data at the district, school, and classroom levels through an instructional management system that monitors student performance relative to performance standards;
- Provide means for disaggregating outcome data by student background characteristics to ensure that programmatic innovations impact the achievement of all students;
- Disseminate descriptions of best practices—e.g., curriculum units, instructional approaches, professional development strategies, etc.—throughout the school system;

- Provide a continuous flow of accounting information that links expenditures to individual schools, programs, and classrooms; and

- Implement other modern management-information systems (e.g., electronic purchasing/invoicing, personnel records, etc.).

Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge and skills also must be present throughout school systems to support the effective functioning of SBI. Subject to collective bargaining laws and the collective bargaining process itself, school boards should, therefore, consider:

- Supporting school-based professional development opportunities that emphasize academic content;

- Creating opportunities for school-site decision makers to learn various process skills—e.g., budgeting, analytical skills, etc.—necessary for effective decision making;

- Supporting the development of systems knowledge through district-wide forums that promote the sharing of ideas and experiences across schools;

- Identifying best practices, effective curricula, and successful instructional approaches through comparative analyses of school sites; and

- Creating incentive programs (e.g., career ladders) that differentiate teachers by performance level and attract the most effective teachers to the most challenging schools.

Oversight/Rewards/Accountability

Under SBI, both school-site councils and the local school board would play important roles in providing oversight and accountability for performance. However, the nature of their respective roles would differ. While site-level evaluations would tend to be more *formative*, focusing on mid-course corrections to school-site improvement initiatives, school boards' evaluations would be more *summative* in nature, assessing how well sites are progressing toward district-wide goals. District-level evaluations would also introduce an element of impartiality, since central authorities presumably have less stake in defending the specific approaches adopted by individual school sites.

Finally, under SBI, reward systems—involving both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives—must be carefully aligned with the desired outcomes and strategic needs of the school system. Specifically, school boards should consider ways to provide flexibility in their compensation systems in order to:

- Reward teachers for actual classroom performance (e.g., team merit awards) on the basis of value-added indicators of teacher effectiveness;

- Differentiate teachers according to ability, status, and rewards—again, based on actual classroom performance;

- Promote teacher collegiality and cooperation; and

- Reward school administrators on the basis of their schools' contribution to student achievement.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the past decade, school-based management has been widely embraced as a means for restructuring power relations in school districts across America. Advocates of SBM cite a broad range of potential benefits associated with this popular reform, including democratization of governance, teacher professionalization and empowerment, greater efficiency in the utilization of scarce resources, enhanced accountability, increased responsiveness to local values and preferences, and improved educational programs. But mounting concern over the productivity of the nation's schools has served to focus greater attention on the potential for SBM to raise student achievement, and, in this critical area, there is little evidence of its success.

This report has examined those factors that have contributed to SBM's ineffectiveness in improving school performance and, based on that analysis, it offers a new approach that effectively "reinvents" SBM. The proposed model, called school-based improvement (SBI), builds upon existing theory, lessons from the private sector, and current practice to establish a more meaningful link between school-site decision making and student outcomes. The SBI approach emphasizes student achievement objectives, a district-wide context that is rich in essential resources, a high degree of stakeholder participation at the district and site levels, and continuous improvement through data-driven decision making. Under SBI, school boards play a key role in promoting an infrastructure conducive to school-based change, providing district-wide oversight, and ensuring accountability. In effect, the school board function is elevated to a new level of responsibility and leadership.

Throughout this report, school-based management has been viewed through the lens of institutional theory, a perspective that suggests that the impact of SBM may be more symbolic than substantive. But as the demand for accountability in public education grows stronger, "feel good" reforms must, inevitably, give way to those initiatives that hold real promise for increasing productivity in the nation's schools. Because of its underlying focus on student achievement, the SBI model offers new hope for districts struggling with existing programs of decentralization or seeking to implement new initiatives of this type. Whether or not that hope is well founded can be determined only through experience, as local school districts begin to embrace this approach and develop its potential—*not* as the next "silver bullet" of education reform, but simply as a well-reasoned alternative to SBM as currently practiced in school districts across America.

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Excellence and Equity in Public Education through School Board Leadership

Executive Summary

Reinventing School-Based Management

A School Board Guide to School-Based Improvement

National School Boards Association

·NSBA·

LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Reinventing School-Based Management

As we approach the dawn of a new millennium, America's schools are increasingly being judged on results, and, more than ever before, policymakers are turning to research for guidance and direction. This report, the latest in a new series of publications on raising student achievement by the National School Boards Association (NSBA), provides local decision makers with a comprehensive, research-based understanding of school-based management, among the leading education reforms of the past decade.

The report, *Reinventing School-Based Management: A School Board Guide to School-Based Improvement*, by NSBA's Director of Policy Research, Dr. Darrel W. Drury, presents a critical analysis of the movement to decentralize decision making in public education and an accompanying vision to guide policymakers in redefining this popular reform to better serve the educational needs of America's youth.

Exhaustive reviews of the literature suggest that school-based management, as practiced in most districts across the United States, has had virtually no effect on student performance. According to the NSBA study, these findings signal the need for a new, more strategically oriented model—one in which school districts grant greater discretion to schools over day-to-day affairs while developing the framework and resources necessary to support local efforts to improve student learning.

The report calls for a constructive and active role for school boards to ensure the successful implementation of a new decentralized management strategy aimed specifically at raising student achievement. School boards would continue to exercise authority over key functions of the district, but their role would be expanded to include other less traditional duties involving the support and oversight of school-based improvement initiatives.

Rhetoric versus Results

The NSBA study cites overwhelming evidence that school-based management has had little payoff for students. For example, one comprehensive review of the literature singled out the most recent and rigorous evaluations of this reform's impact on student performance. Its conclusion: In all but two studies, school-based management had no effect or negative effects on achievement, and, in the cases of those studies that properly isolated the influence of decentralized decision making, no evidence of a positive effect was reported. Another review, based on more than 80 project evaluations conducted over the past several years, yielded similar results. The NSBA report concludes that, in too many instances, school-based management has served as little more than "institutional window dressing," providing a veneer of rationality and efficiency while leaving day-to-day classroom operations intact.

The new study asserts that a major flaw underlying the school-based management approach is that neither the theory nor the practice behind it has focused on raising student achievement. Too often, district officials introducing school-based planning initiatives have lost sight of the central goal of education—i.e., improving student performance. In turn, school-based initiatives tend to emphasize such peripheral issues as hall duty, campus beautification, and the assignment of parking spaces, while overlooking core issues of curriculum and instructional programming. Not surprisingly, the partial realignment of schools' power structure is often the only tangible result.

Barriers and Constraints

Contributing to the failure of school-based management to boost performance is the fact that these initiatives have not been designed to address deficiencies in crucial resources at the school level. The information, knowledge, and rewards necessary to spark innovation and improvement in the nation's schools are largely lacking, the report says. Decentralized management reforms are further constrained by widespread limitations on the scope of schools' authority over budget, staffing, and instructional programs. Finally, these initiatives tend to offer shared decision making in name only, concentrating authority in the hands of school-site administrators, while providing few opportunities for teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to influence school decision making.

According to the report, policies at the district, state, and federal levels, along with collective bargaining agreements, combine to restrict school-site autonomy and promote uniformity in standards and practices. For example, state laws and regulations can place unnecessary constraints on the ability of site-governed schools to innovate and respond to local needs. At the district level, authorities sometimes place strict limits of their own on the ability of site-managed schools to develop new programs and initiatives, even where restrictive state laws are not a factor. Union contracts negotiated at the local level—with provisions governing class size, seniority rights, etc.—impose further constraints on the flexibility of school-site decision-making teams.

Unwarranted Assumptions

The report points out that, despite the many rationales for school-based management, there is no compelling theory that explains precisely how decentralized decision making might be expected

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to produce achievement gains. Arguments linking school-based management to student performance are often presented in isolation, without reference to the larger district context, and sometimes make unwarranted assumptions about the degree to which decision making is shared at the school level.

For example, it is widely held that those closest to the "technical core" of education systems will make better decisions about educational programs than those farther removed from teaching and learning. But this implies that teachers consistently bring to the classroom the kind of information and skills needed to improve student performance, a position for which support is mixed at best. A growing number of critics express concern over the quality of current teacher training programs, and others cite mounting evidence that at least some teachers lack the basic pedagogical skills necessary to teach effectively.

Advocates of school-based management also assert that decisions concerning curricula, instructional technologies, and other programmatic features of education will be most effective and enduring when carried out by those who feel a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for those decisions. However, school-based management may not produce a greater sense of motivation or commitment among teachers in schools that endow principals with virtually all real decision-making authority, and, even in those schools fully embracing participatory management, staff ownership over decisions may not be sufficient to sustain new instructional programs. Without appropriate incentives, innovation may give way to retrenchment and the reintroduction of traditional approaches to instruction.

Finally, it is widely believed that shifting key areas of decision-making authority to the school level will increase accountability among teachers and administrators. But again, this line of reasoning assumes that, under school-based management, decision making is both decentralized and shared. As the report warns, site-governed schools that vest decision-making authority solely in school administrators may experience no greater accountability than those operating within more centralized systems.

The Missing Framework

The study contends that, for school-based management to work, districts must begin to reevaluate the level of flexibility that individual schools currently exercise in key decision-making domains, while taking steps to ensure the presence of crucial resources and appropriate oversight at the school site. The ultimate aim is to stimulate better decision making and to give school personnel a greater stake in the educational process.

In this regard, educators have much to learn from the private sector, where a growing number of businesses have developed effective, high-involvement approaches to participatory management that emphasize access to four essential resources. These include:

- **Power** to influence decisions affecting work processes, policies, and strategy;
- **Information** that furthers understanding of the organization's operational systems, external environment, performance requirements, and level of performance;
- **Knowledge** required for effective job performance; and
- **Rewards** aligned with the self-interest of employees and with the success of the organization.

But even fully informed, knowledgeable, and motivated school-site decision makers can make bad decisions. To ensure their effectiveness, stakeholders involved in participatory management also must be endowed with the means of processing information and applying knowledge to generate higher-quality decisions. The report argues convincingly that continuous school improvement can best be achieved when the strengths of individual workers are recognized, innovation is encouraged, and decisions are based on facts rather than opinions.

Toward a Theory of School-Based Improvement

As the name implies, school-based management has been concerned less with the need to raise student performance than with a broad range of procedural activities that bear little relationship to achievement. According to the NSBA report, this misdirected focus cannot be redressed simply by "patching up" the current reform. The report urges educators and policymakers to consider a new, more comprehensive approach, in which decentralization is just one part of a broader systemic change process. This strategy, called "school-based improvement,"

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differs from school-based management in several important respects:

- It emphasizes student achievement over governance and administration;
- It requires the establishment of a district-wide context that promotes school-based change;
- It considers the participation of teachers and parents to be central, rather than peripheral, to the process; and
- It emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement through data-driven decision making.

Among the most significant advantages of this new approach over school-based management is that it creates a context through which schools gain much-needed support and direction from the district. Under current practice, site-managed schools tend to resemble "cottage industries" operating within loose confederations. In this environment, schools are likely to experience difficulty in relating to other schools within the system and in articulating the larger goals that drive improvement. Robert Walker, superintendent of Florida's Monroe County School District, which has 13 site-managed schools, puts it this way: "We have 13 feudal states—they dig their moats, erect their towers, and occasionally shout at one another."

Authentic participation of teachers and parents in school-based decision making is a central feature of the school-based improvement approach. Teacher and parent involvement can engender a sense of ownership, promote greater understanding of the reasons behind decisions, and provide information on how decisions relate to existing practices. The involvement of parents and other community members may also result in greater professional and administrative accountability.

Identifying an important weakness of current practice, the report urges school boards to take steps to overcome the tendency toward administrative control of school-site decision-making councils. For example, boards might consider: (1) prescribing the composition of councils to ensure a greater voice for teachers and parents; (2) specifying the rules governing the process for selecting council representatives; (3) establishing clear voting procedures to ensure more meaningful participation; and (4) granting school-site councils more influence in the hiring, evaluation, and continuation of school administrators.

Another central feature of the school-based improvement approach is its emphasis on continuous improvement through data-driven decision making. Here, too, district authorities can play a key role, providing the leadership, resources, and training to ensure a smooth transition from a school culture where decisions are based on perceptions to one in which decisions are based on the objective evaluation of data.

Establishing the Infrastructure

According to the report, if the school-based improvement model is to be taken seriously by those charged with decision-making responsibility at the building level, school boards must begin to reexamine those policies that may unnecessarily constrain the flexibility of site-managed schools. Specific guidance is offered to districts choosing to increase the discretion of schools over budgetary, staffing, and programmatic decisions.

- **Budgetary Decisions.** Districts should determine which functions should remain centralized (e.g., building construction, technology infrastructure, etc.) and which should be decentralized, allocating those funds not required for the fulfillment of centralized functions to school sites. The approval of site-based budgets would remain within the purview of the school board, but district oversight should be directed more toward ensuring each site's consistency with the district's vision, standards, policies, and legal requirements and less toward the details of each site's educational plan.
- **Staffing Decisions.** Districts may choose to screen potential employees for state certification and other qualifications, but, within the limitations imposed by state law and collective bargaining agreements, principals and school-site councils should have a stronger role in the selection of new professional and support staff. In addition, districts may wish to grant schools more involvement in the selection and retention of administrative staff.
- **Programmatic Decisions.** Districts should have responsibility for establishing a broad framework of goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, while schools should have responsibility for determining the appropriate means of achieving those ends. Although schools may draw upon central resources in developing their instructional programs, policies concerning the grouping of students, pedagogical approaches, textbook selection, and curricula should—with few exceptions—be decided at the school level.

In addition, the report recommends that school boards develop appropriate strategies for creating the resources that schools need to make informed administrative decisions and to motivate their staffs to faithfully implement those decisions. Especially critical is the need for information, knowledge, and rewards, at the school level and throughout the system.

- **Information.** In order to make educationally sound decisions, school-site decision makers must have access to high-quality information pertaining to organizational performance and the flow of resources.
- **Knowledge.** Teachers must have professional development that emphasizes aca-

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demic content and is reinforced through actual classroom experience. Teachers, parents, and administrators also require opportunities to broaden their knowledge of the larger system and to learn various process skills for effective decision making.

■ **Rewards/Accountability.** Rewards must be carefully aligned with the desired outcomes and strategic needs of the district (e.g., compensation systems that reward teachers and administrators on the basis of value-added performance measures).

The State of the Evidence

Although the school-based improvement model proposed in the NSBA study has not been evaluated in its entirety, individual aspects of the approach have been studied with encouraging results. These studies suggest that key elements of the proposed model are associated with more effective schooling and higher performance. In addition, some parallels can be drawn to Comer's Comprehensive School Development Program, recognized by many for its effectiveness in raising student achievement.

But perhaps the most compelling evidence in support of the new model is contained in a 1998 report by the National Education Goals Panel exploring gains in student scores in North Carolina and Texas on the National Assessment of Educational Progress between 1990 and 1997. These results have been attributed to a policy environment that includes: local control and greater flexibility for teachers and administrators; an accountability system that rewards schools for improved performance; statewide assessments tied to academic standards; and widespread access to data for continuous improvement. The similarities between these key elements and those emphasized in the proposed model are striking.

Such evidence suggests the potential for the school-based improvement approach to provide a more meaningful link between school-site decision making and student outcomes. However, the report points out that local district authorities are best positioned to evaluate local readiness, capacity, and commitment to initiate and sustain school-based improvement, and cautions against state-mandated initiatives.

The Role of the School Board

Under the proposed model, school boards would play an essential role in designing an infrastructure that promotes school-based change, provides district-wide oversight, and ensures accountability. District authorities would also lead the effort to articulate a common understanding of schools' educational objectives, content standards, and measures of student and teacher success, as well as other goals of interest to the community. School boards would likely be involved in determining:

- The conditions that all schools must meet prior to initiating school-based improvement;
- The educational standards and policies that would apply to each school;
- The extent of schools' discretionary authority;
- The kind of centralized support and services available to schools;
- The resources that could be obtained from outside providers;
- The process to be used for site plan approval, oversight, and accountability; and
- The circumstances that would trigger district-level intervention in school-site operations or the curtailment of local discretion in certain areas.

Under this approach, school-site accountability would be largely self-regulating, based on a system of performance-based rewards, professional controls, and local civic oversight. But no system is foolproof, and ultimately, district-level policymakers are accountable for the effective and equitable functioning of all schools. District authorities must, therefore, be prepared to intervene and provide supplemental assistance to struggling schools, and where these efforts fail, provide greater central oversight.

New Hope

Given its underlying focus on student achievement, the school-based improvement model provides an important alternative to districts struggling with existing programs of decentralization, as well as those seeking to implement new initiatives of this type. Although the NSBA report stops short of advocating the proposed model as the new "silver bullet" of education reform, in light of its strong theoretical base and a growing body of corroborating evidence, it seems inevitable that this approach will inspire new hope among educators and policymakers alike.

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NSBA's Student Achievement Series

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has made the education of all children its chief priority. Toward that end, NSBA has become a leading source of information for local boards, supporting their efforts to raise student achievement in their communities. As an integral part of that effort, in the spring of 1998, NSBA launched an ambitious series of reports on student achievement. *Reinventing School-Based Management* is the third volume in the series. We hope that this report, like those that preceded it, will support our shared mission to enhance school board effectiveness in raising student achievement in local communities across the nation.

About the Author

Dr. Darrel W. Drury joined NSBA as Director of Policy Research in January 1998. Prior to his appointment, he served on the faculty of Yale University, where he conducted a broad range of policy studies concerning the state of American public education. In addition to this report, he is principal author of several publications in the area of school- and district-level management including *School-Based Management: The Changing Locus of Control in American Public Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1994) and "Perspectives in Decision Making in Educational Systems," in *Measuring the Quality of Schools* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1995).

About NSBA...

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Ordering Information

Copies of *Reinventing School-Based Management* are priced at $20 ($16 for NSBA National Affiliates), plus postage and handling. To order by telephone, call NSBA at (800) 706-6722 or fax your order to NSBA at (301) 604-0158. Please specify order number 11-122-ES.

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